Godhead is light. Nescience is darkness. Where there is Godhead there is no nescience.

BACK TO GODHEAD

The Magazine of the Hare Krishna Movement • Sept/Oct 2008 • $4.50

A Call to SPIRITUAL HEROISM

How movie heroes display the villainous tendencies of Rāvaṇa, the enemy of Lord Rāma. (See page 22)

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Back to Godh

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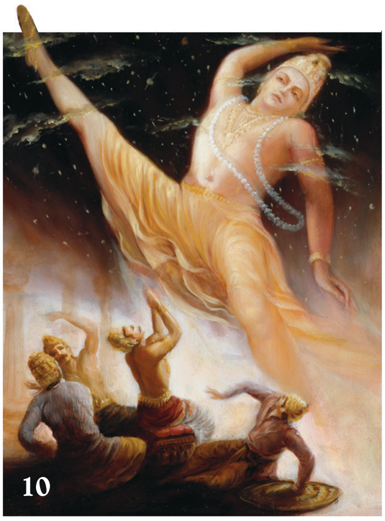

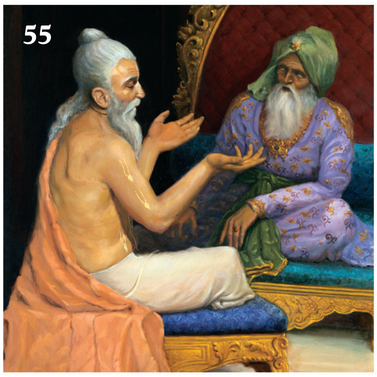

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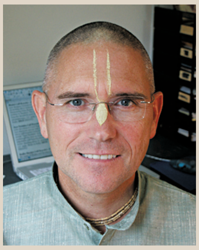
COVER Lord Rāma, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, slays the wicked king Rāvaṇa. To read about the mindset that distinguishes heroes from villains, please see the article beginning on page 22. (Detail from a painting by Jñānāñjana Dāsa)

"Real life means you have to minimize bodily activities so you can save time and devote yourself to spiritual understanding. The present civilization based on the bodily concept of life is animal life. It is not civilized life. Civilized life begins when one is so advanced that he inquires about the spirit soul. But when there is no such inquiry, people are like cats and dogs."—p. 30

WELCOME



THREE ARTICLES in this issue relate to events on the Vaiṣṇava calendar (p. 39) for September–October. Aja Govinda Dāsa, continuing his series on Lord Kṛṣṇa's ten prominent incarnations, draws from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and other scriptures to relate the history of the appearance of Lord Vāmana, who traversed the universe in two steps.

The festival known as Dushehra or Rāma Vijaya commemorates Lord Rāmacandra's victory over Rāvaṇa and rescue of Sītā Devī, Rāma's eternal consort. In "A Call to Spiritual Heroism," Caitanya Caraṇa Dāsa shows that while the *Rāmāyaṇa* clearly identifies the hero and the villain, the so-called heroes of today's movies lack the essential quality of the true hero.

October marks the beginning of Kārttika, a month that includes the festival of Govardhana Pūjā. Many pilgrims honor Kārttika month by walking around Govardhana Hill in Vṛndāvana. Vaiśeṣika Dāsa, who spent time at the Hare Kṛṣṇa temple in the town of Govardhana, describes some scenes on the path around Govardhana Hill.

What inspires pilgrims to undertake the difficult fourteen-mile walk around Govardhana? For most, it's the hope of a spiritual reward. In "Hope: The Bedrock of Spiritual Progress," Viśākhā Devī Dāsī writes about the importance of spiritual hope.

Hare Kṛṣṇa.—*Nāgarāja Dāsa, Editor*

OUR PURPOSES

- To help all people discern reality from illusion, spirit from matter, the eternal from the temporary.
- To expose the faults of materialism.
- To offer guidance in the Vedic techniques of spiritual life.
- To preserve and spread the Vedic culture.
- To celebrate the chanting of the holy names of God as taught by Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.
- To help every living being remember and serve Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Personality of Godhead.

Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are together the one Supreme Absolute Truth.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the combined incarnation of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, inaugurated the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa five hundred years ago.

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

BACK TO GODHEAD

The Magazine of the
Hare Krishna Movement

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Letters

Peace and Sustenance

How do you remain fixed when the entire world is questioning your beliefs and you feel like giving up to find peace and sustenance?

Shruti D. Jedhiya
Via the Internet

Our reply: Yes, it is a difficult world out there. But we should know what we want in life. The world that questions our beliefs cannot provide any useful solutions for our peace and sustenance. The problems of birth, death, old age, and disease haunt us at every turn. No one can prevent these problems. With these problems in front of us, we should be determined in our spiritual progress.

To remain fixed, one should seek the association of devotees who practice *bhakti-yoga* without motivation or hindrance. If we are in the midst of materialists, we tend to think like them and think there is reality in the illusion of material existence. But by being in the company of devotees, we gain knowledge. And by chanting Kṛṣṇa's names, hearing about Him, and eating *kṛṣṇa-prasādam,* our minds become purified and we can clearly see the falsity of material progress.

So please chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and try to be in the company of devotees as much as possible, at least through the Internet, if not in person.

Chanting with Feeling

Please tell me how to chant with feeling, so that I get very good results.

Nina Sood
Via the Internet

Our reply: Śrīla Prabhupāda said that we should chant like a child crying for its mother. We have to feel dependent on the Lord. The mantra is a prayer asking Him to engage us in His service.

Find your sacred place to chant without disturbance, and then be conscious that this is your personal, intimate time with Kṛṣṇa. You are going to chant for a certain amount of time, so take it seriously and chant attentively. To hear and chant properly takes a lot of practice. The tongue, lips, and jaw should be moving, and the ears ready to hear.

Now, getting down to the heart—that's when the work really begins. The mind usually makes it hard to concentrate and get to the point of bringing the name to the heart. Then comes the time to pour out your heart, to let Kṛṣṇa know your desire to contact Him, to get to know Him, and to satisfy Him. The chanting is for His pleasure and our purification. It is not just to feel some "high" of transcendence. The results will be a revival of our Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which is granted when Kṛṣṇa is pleased.

Kṛṣṇa's Apparent Partiality

Kṛṣṇa says he loves the *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana more than anyone else. Isn't this partial and—forgive me, but—even cheating, when it is said that our constitutional position is already designed?

Lakshmikanth
Via the Internet

Our reply: Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that as others approach Him, He reciprocates in kind. He says the He is equal to all but especially loves those who love Him. The *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana love Kṛṣṇa more than anyone else. They give up everything to love Him, and Kṛṣṇa reciprocates their love. That is not partial; it is just and natural.

Our basic position is that of a servant of the Lord. How we choose to serve is up to us. We can passively adore Kṛṣṇa, actively serve Him, be His friend, or serve Him with parental affection or in the conjugal mood.

Controlling the Will

I want to be a determined person. Will you tell me how we can control our will?

Sachin
Via the Internet

Our reply: By making vows and sticking to them we can increase our determination. In this age the most important vow to make is to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* a fixed number of times each day. If you have not done this, you can begin today.

Another good vow is to eat only food offered to Kṛṣṇa. By following these two vows, your consciousness will gradually be elevated to the platform of goodness, where controlling the mind and senses is relatively easy.

Why Are We Here?

Why do we face problems that we don't deserve? Why do we choose to live materially? Why did God send us here if He loves us and cares for us?

Disha
Via the Internet

Our reply: These are good questions to ask so that we can achieve the perfection of human life. If a criminal asks, "Why am I suffering in prison, which I don't deserve? Why did the government send me to prison if it cares for me?" then what will you say? God does care for us. But because we have done something wrong, we are sent to the prison of the material world.

We choose to enjoy separately from Kṛṣṇa and become envious of Him. So Kṛṣṇa kindly gives us this world, where we can enjoy in illusion. If we had done nothing wrong, we would not be suffering in God's creation. He is all-merciful and loves us dearly. So as not to disturb the law-abiding souls, Kṛṣṇa sends a few troublesome souls like us to the material world. The majority of souls stay in the spiritual world, enjoying with Kṛṣṇa.

To get out of this world we should chant the holy names of Kṛṣṇa and eat only food offered to Him. Just by doing these two acts, we can be purified.

Afraid of Offenses

Whenever I'm near devotees, I'm always anxious because I fear I might commit some offense unknowingly. If we unknowingly offend a Vaiṣṇava, will Kṛṣṇa forgive us or punish us? It is said in *Gītā* that even a small amount of devotional service never goes fruitless, even after death. But if a person offends a Vaiṣṇava, does all the devotional service he has done for Kṛṣṇa go waste?

Deepanshu
Via the Internet

Our reply: Your concern is valid. We should be careful not to offend Vaiṣṇavas. But the way to rectify this mentality is to associate with the Vaiṣṇavas. In their company, we will learn from their example how to avoid offenses.

It is an offense to belittle or speak ill of Vaiṣṇavas. If by inattention we offend them, we must beg their forgiveness. A true Vaiṣṇava will readily forgive, and then so will Kṛṣṇa.

The reaction to an offense will depend on its severity. If we deliberately commit a grievous offense, our progress in devotional service will be blocked. But if we beg forgiveness and the Vaiṣṇava forgives us, we can continue with devotional service and not lose anything.

Replies were written by Krishna.com's Live Help volunteers. Please write to us at: BTG, P.O. Box 430, Alachua, FL 32616, USA. E-mail: editors@krishna.com.

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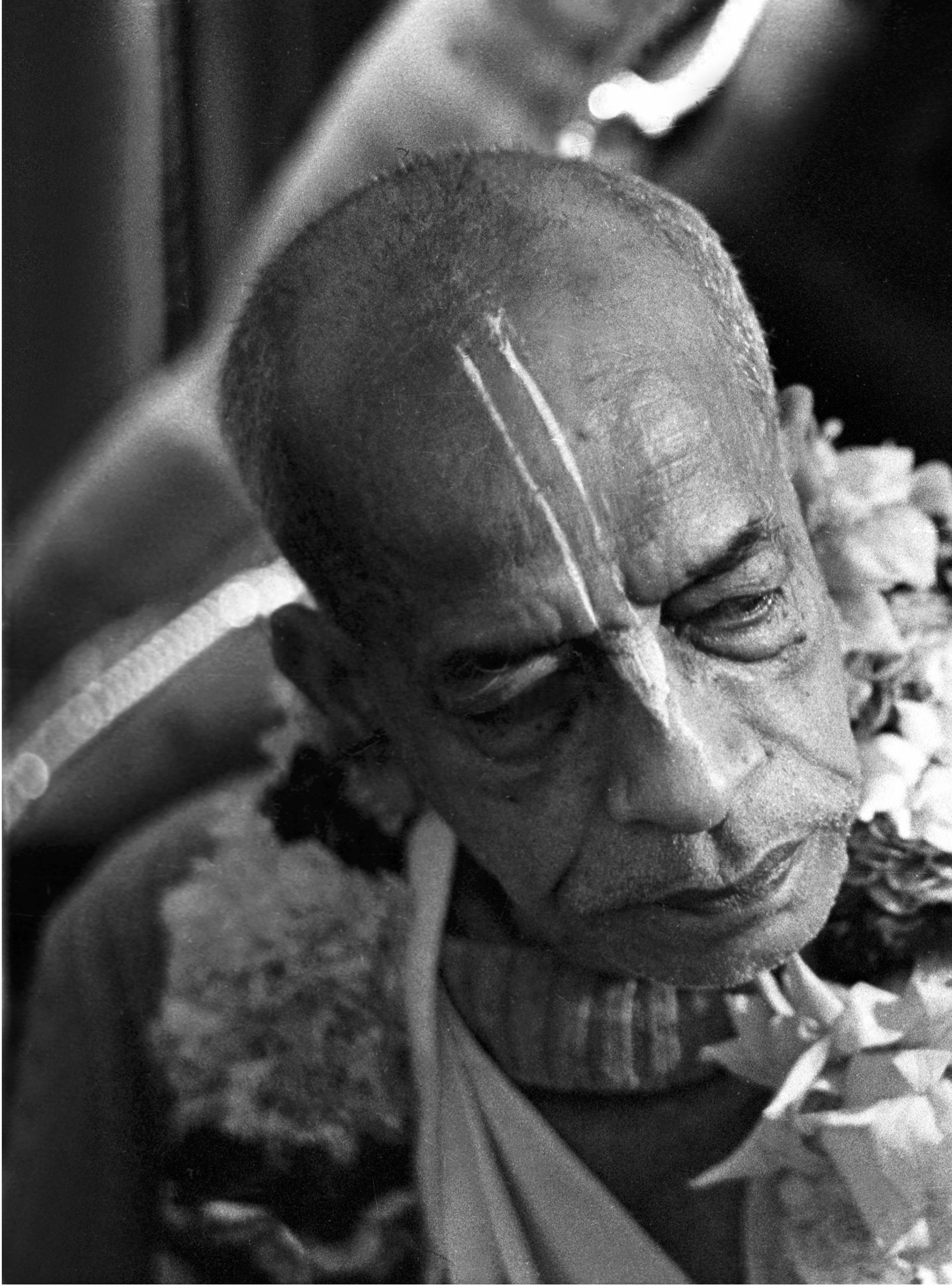
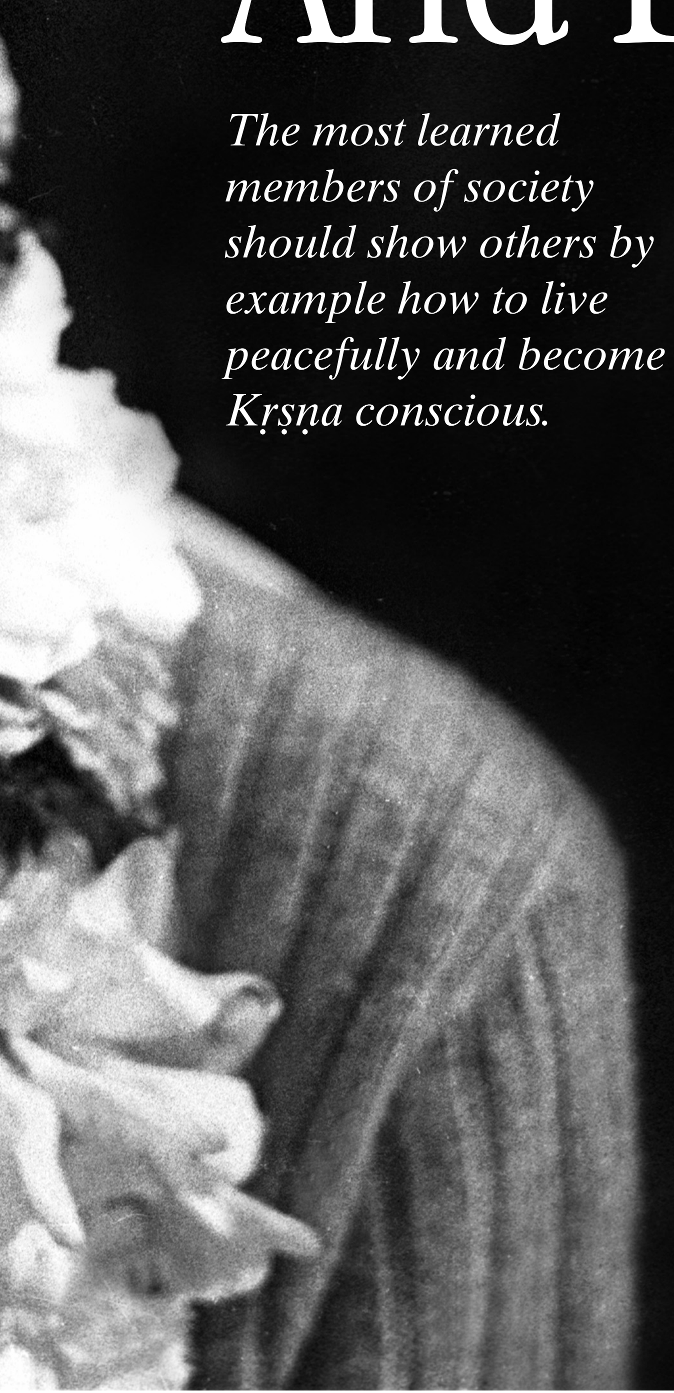


FOUNDER'S LECTURE

Hyderabad, India—December 17, 1976

Intelligence And Example



The most learned members of society should show others by example how to live peacefully and become Kṛṣṇa conscious.

by His Divine Grace
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda
Founder-*Ācārya* of the International Society
For Krishna Consciousness

---

saktāḥ karmaṇy avidvāṁso / yathā kurvanti bhārata
kuryād vidvāṁs tathāsaktaś / cikīrṣur loka-saṅgraham

"As the ignorant perform their duties with attachment to results, the learned may similarly act, but without attachment, for the sake of leading people on the right path."
—*Bhagavad-gītā* 3.25

THERE ARE TWO classes of men: *vidvān,* or the learned, and the fools, who are not learned. Human beings are, of course, much more intelligent than the animals, but among human beings some are more intelligent, some less intelligent.

Animals and human beings have equal intelligence in the matter of eating, sleeping, sex, and defense. These activities don't require any education. Even the dog knows how to have sex. That doesn't require Freud's philosophy. But the rascals in human society think, "Here is a big philosopher. He is writing about sex." This is going on.

For eating, land is available. If you work a little and produce your food grains, you can eat sumptuously. Eating doesn't require a technologically advanced slaughterhouse for killing many cows so that we can live in the city at the cost of the lives of the poor animals. This is misuse of intelligence; it is not intelligence. Therefore a devotee who is intelligent should show how to use our intelligence.

Here it is said, *saktāḥ karmaṇy avidvāṁsaḥ.*

Avidvāṁsaḥ—fools, men with a poor fund of knowledge—have discovered so many lines of activity that are simply foolishness. The so-called advancement of civilization is planned by the *avidvāṁsaḥ,* men with a poor fund of knowledge. They are not advancing civilization. They do not believe in the transmigration of the soul. They avoid the major issue, and they plan. In this life they will live for fifty or sixty years, making big, big plans, being materially attached (*saktāḥ karmaṇi*), and discovering new methods of engagement. *Avidvāṁsaḥ.* They do not know how to engage one's brain and talent.

Atheistic Civilization

That is the difference between a *devatā,* or godly person, and an *asura,* or atheist. Because the *asura* thinks he will live forever, he prepares big, big plans for material comforts. That is asuric civilization. No one will be allowed to stay here. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (8.15) Lord Kṛṣṇa says, *duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam:* the material world is miserable and temporary. It is the place for suffering so that we can understand our position as souls subordinate to God.

But fools do not consider the suffering. They make plans for more suffering. This is a foolish civilization. The so-called scientists talk of advancement, but it is a jugglery of words.

Any intelligent person can ask, "So what have you solved? What kind of solution have you made to the problems of birth, death, old age, and disease? Have you solved these problems?"

They cannot say yes. They will say, "We are trying, and after millions of years it may be possible. It may be that we shall live forever."

They say like that. Now, who is going to live for millions of years to confirm your proposal? Everyone will be finished within fifty, sixty years. You too will be finished. And who is going to see the results of your action?

This is going on. Therefore it is the duty of the intelligent person to show the way of living.

For example, we who have taken to Kṛṣṇa consciousness show the example by plowing fields to produce our food. For ourselves, we can go anywhere and beg for a little food. We have no need for big agricultural activities, but we work, without attachment, to show others.

We have no need, but still we have to work. Here it is said, *kuryāt:* "He must do it."

I can say, "What is the necessity of my big agricultural program? I can go anywhere and ask for a little food."

No, we have to do it. Why? *Kuryād vidvāṁs tathā asaktaḥ:* A learned person acts, but without attachment. The *karmīs,* persons without spiritual knowledge, are very attached even to nonsensical things. But one who is *vidvān* acts like the *karmīs,* but without attachment.

Why? *Cikīrṣur loka-saṅgraham:* So that others may follow.

"Why are you making big, big plans for big, big factories? Take to this process to solve your economic problem."

Kṛṣṇa advises, *kṛṣi-go-rakṣya-vāṇijyaṁ vaiśya-karma svabhāva-jam* [Bg. 18.44]. He prescribes agriculture, cow protection, and trade. No industry. Kṛṣṇa never encourages industry. As for trade, here we are attempting to grow food. If after eating there is excess, then we can take the food grains or anything we have produced to a place where there is need. That is called trade. Exchange is also trade. So that is recommended by Kṛṣṇa, and because we are Kṛṣṇa conscious, we must abide by the order of Kṛṣṇa.

The Brāhmaṇas' Duty

Still, farming is not for everyone. It is for the class of men in the third category. The first category is the *brāhmaṇa,* the man in knowledge. He knows the value of life, how life should be directed this way and that way. He has knowledge, and he guides those who have no such knowledge. Therefore, the *brāhmaṇa* is the guru for all other classes.

Our position is that of the *brāhmaṇa,* but we are *anāsakta,* without attachment. Without any attachment we shall try to give others direction on how one can live very peacefully and save time for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That is stated here. *Kuryād vidvāṁs tathā asaktaś cikīrṣur loka-saṅgraham.* The idea is to direct people to live peacefully and become Kṛṣṇa conscious.

Thank you very much.

Hare Kṛṣṇa.

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Glossary

Ācārya—a spiritual master who teaches by example.

Balarāma—Lord Kṛṣṇa's first expansion, who acts in the role of Lord Kṛṣṇa's elder brother.

Battle of Kurukshetra—an epic battle for rule of the world, fought five thousand years ago.

Bhagavad-gītā—the sacred book in which Lord Kṛṣṇa gives the essence of knowledge to His friend and disciple Arjuna.

Bhakti—devotional service to the Supreme Lord.

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura—the spiritual master of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.

Bhakti-yoga—linking with the Supreme Lord through devotional service.

Caitanya Mahāprabhu—the incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa who appeared five hundred years ago to teach the chanting of the names of God as the religion for the present age.

Darśana—"viewing," audience with a deity or saintly person.

Dharma—(1) ordained duties or religious principles; (2) one's eternal, natural occupation (i.e., devotional service to the Lord).

Godhead—the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Reality, progressively realized first as the impersonal all-pervasive oneness, more fully as the Supersoul within the heart of every living being, and ultimately as the all-opulent Supreme Person.

Gurukula—a school where children learn the philosophy and practices of Kṛṣṇa consciousness along with regular academic subjects (literally "the place of the guru").

Hare Kṛṣṇa—the great mantra Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.

ISKCON—the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Japa—individual chanting of names of God, usually while counting on beads.

Kali-yuga—in the endlessly repeated cycle of four cosmic ages, the present and worst age, the Age of Quarrel, of which 5,000 of 432,000 years have passed.

Karma—material action; its inevitable reaction; or the law by which such action and reaction are governed.

Kīrtana—congregational singing of names of God, usually accompanied by cymbals (*karatālas*) and drums (*mṛdaṅgas*).

Kṛṣṇa—the Supreme Personality of Godhead in His original transcendental form (see "Godhead").

Mahābhārata—the epic history of ancient India, a history in which the *Bhagavad-gītā* appears as the most important and well-known text.

Māyā—illusion; the energy of the Supreme Lord that deludes living entities into forgetting their spiritual nature and forgetting God.

Māyāvādī—one who regards the Abs [illegible] ultimately impersonal.

Modes of nature—the three qualities (goo [illegible] and ignorance) that hold sway over all action in the material world.

Nityānanda—the incarnation of Lord Balarāma who appeared with Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Prasādam—vegetarian food that has been prepared for the Lord and offered to Him with devotion (literally "mercy").

Purāṇas—Vedic histories.

Rādhārāṇī—Lord Kṛṣṇa's consort and pleasure potency.

Rathayātrā—"chariot festival": a festival in which the form of Kṛṣṇa is borne in procession on a large canopy-topped chariot or float, especially the festival originating in Puri, India, for Jagannātha (Lord Kṛṣṇa, "the Lord of the universe").

Sannyāsa—the renounced life of a man who relinquishes home to dedicate himself fully to the Supreme.

Śrī—an honorific meaning "opulent" (similarly: Śrīla, Śrīmad, Śrīmān, Śrīmatī).

Śrīla Prabhupāda—His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, the founder-*ācārya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam—the most important of the eighteen *Purāṇas,* which tells of the nature and pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotees.

Supersoul—the form of the Lord who resides in every heart along with the individual soul.

Upaniṣads—the 108 essential philosophical treatises that appear within the *Vedas.*

Vaiṣṇava—a devotee of the Supreme Lord (from the word *Viṣṇu*).

Varṇāśrama—the Vedic social system. It organizes society into four occupational and four spiritual divisions (*varṇas* and *āśramas*). The members of the four *varṇas* are the *brāhmaṇas* (intellectuals and priests), the *kṣatriyas* (administrators and soldiers), the *vaiśyas* (farmers and businessmen), and the *śūdras* (laborers and artisans). The members of the four *āśramas* are the *brahmacārīs* (celibate students), *gṛhasthas* (married people), *vānaprasthas* (retired people), and *sannyāsīs* (renunciants).

Vedas—the hymns of knowledge revealed by the Lord Himself at the beginning of creation.

Vedic—pertaining to the culture in which the *Vedas* and related scriptures guide all aspects of human life.

Viṣṇu—any form of the Personality of Godhead (see "Godhead"); the forms the Lord manifests to create and sustain the material world.

Vṛndāvana—the transcendental abode of Lord Kṛṣṇa, mirrored on earth as the town in India where Kṛṣṇa appeared five thousand years ago.

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LORD VĀMANA

Resolves the Universal Conflict

Lord Viṣṇu comes in disguise to return control of the universe to the demigods, His devotees.

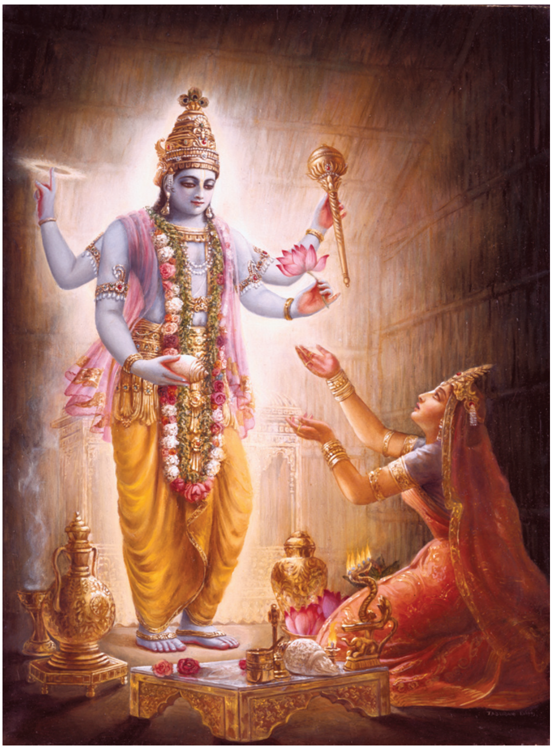
by Aja Govinda Dāsa

GOD IS THE MASTER of all arts, including the art of conflict resolution. He is the loving father of all, and His every action benefits all His children. The story of Lord Vāmana shows how the Lord satisfied two rival parties and ended a cosmic war between the demons and demigods.

We also learn from this pastime that the highest compassion of the Lord is His depriving His devotee of all material defenses so that the devotee can surrender unto Him unconditionally. The Lord does this to increase the devotees' loving reliance upon Him, freeing them from dependence on their fleeting worldly powers.

The Virtuous King Prahlāda

The story of Lord Vāmana is a sequel to the story of Lord Nṛsiṁha. Briefly stated, Lord Nṛsiṁha descended to protect His devotee Prahlāda Mahārāja, who was terrorized by his atheist father, Hiraṇyakaśipu. After Sri Nṛsiṁhadeva killed (and liberated) the atheist tyrant, Prahlāda Mahārāja was crowned emperor of the demons, the enemies of the demigods. The demigods (administrative heads of the universe) then regained their sovereignty of heaven, which had been under Hiraṇyakiśipu's control.



Painting by Yadurāṇī Devī Dāsī

After performing the payo-vrata *ritual, Aditi, mother of the demigods, receives the direct audience of Lord Viṣṇu, who agreed to become her son (Vāmana). At right, Lord Vāmana pierces the covering of the universe with His foot.*

After Nṛsiṁhadeva set things in order, how did conflict again arise between the demons and demigods? Now that the peace-loving saintly king Prahlāda was ruling the demons, how could there be wars?

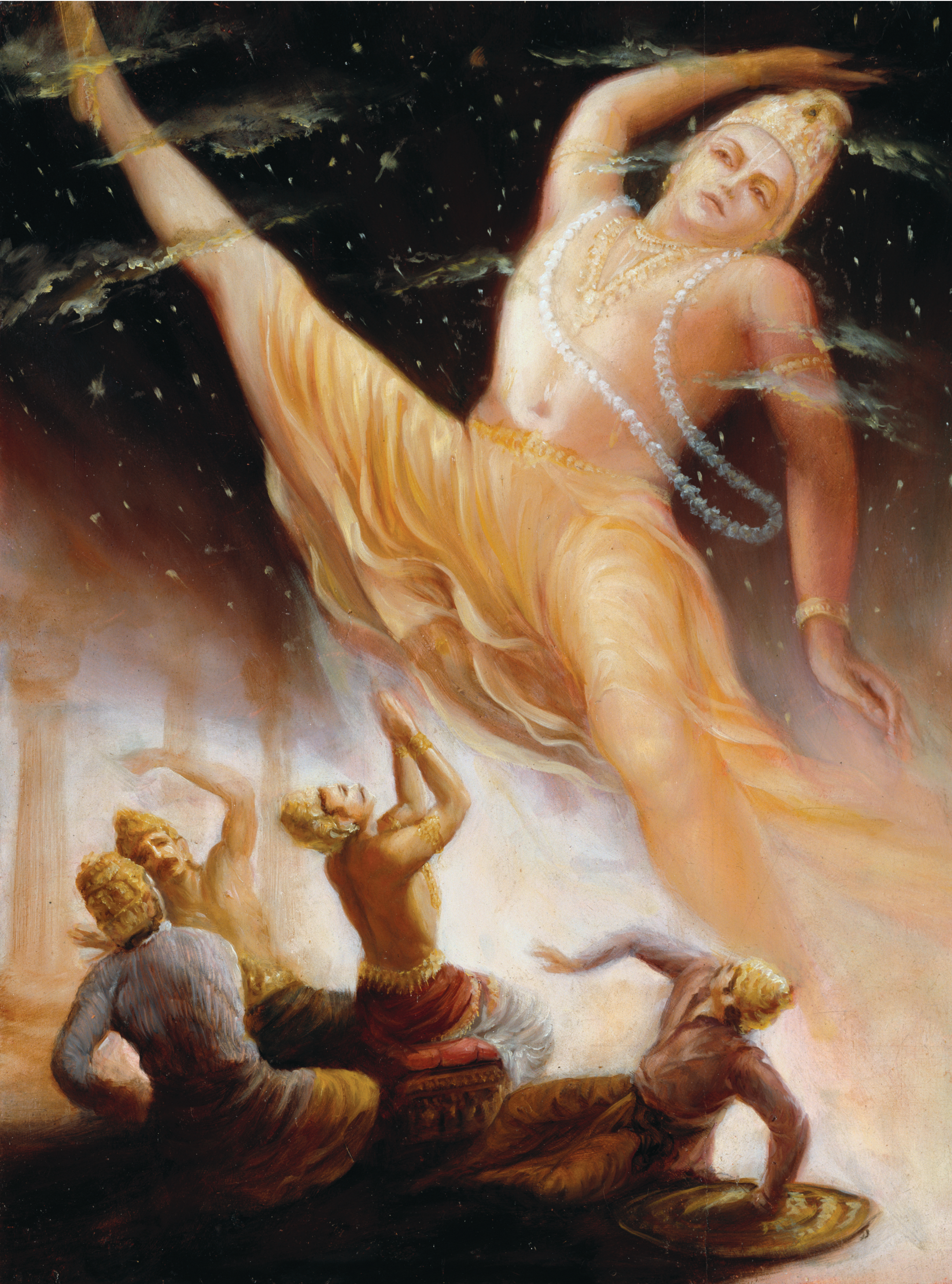
Prahlāda Mahārāja was so peace-loving and saintly that he demonstrated his selflessness by caring more for his public than for his own family. When Prahlāda's son Virocana wished to marry a girl desired by a young *brāhmaṇa,* Prahlāda instructed Virocana to renounce his own desire. Prahlāda thus showed that the king and his family should always serve the public and never exert force or power over them to fulfill their own desires. (*Mahābhārata, Udyoga Parva* 35).

With such an amiable king in charge, the demons were peaceable. But after Prahlāda renounced the throne and passed it on to his son Virocana, the hatred between the demigods and demons arose again.

Here's the history behind Prahlāda's renouncing the throne.

Once, while Prahlāda was still ruling, a sage bathing in a holy river was bit by a serpent, which coiled around his legs and dragged him underwater. Because of his sincere faith in the protection of Lord Viṣṇu, the sage was unaffected. The snake pulled him all the

Painting by Rāmadāsa Abhirāma Dāsa



way down to the subterranean kingdom of the demons, where Prahlāda honored him. During their meeting, the sage inspired Prahlāda to visit pilgrimage sites.

On a visit to a holy forest, Prahlāda saw a pine tree pierced with arrows, its sap looking like tears of anguish. Near the tree sat two ascetics. Angered by the sight of their arrows in the innocent tree, Prahlāda attacked them. But the ascetics easily defeated him in battle. He then prayed to Lord Viṣṇu, who told him he could win over the two ascetics only by devotion. The ascetics were in fact Nara-Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣis, incarnations of Viṣṇu. To beg their pardon for fighting them, Prahlāda then renounced his kingdom and retired to perform penance. After this incident, Prahlāda served only as an advisor to his successors. (*Vāmana Purāṇa* 7–8)

Empowered with the nectar of immortality, the demigods repulsed the attacking demons.

Virocana, Son of Prahlāda

Virocana became the next emperor of the demons. Blessed with a dazzling golden crown, a boon from the sun-god, he became arrogant and offensive toward the demigods. Virocana had received the benediction that he could not be killed as long as he wore the crown. (*Gaṇeśa Purāṇa* 2.29) Knowing this, the demigods conspired against him. Disguised as sages, they entreated him, and the generous Virocana vowed to grant their wish. They begged for his crown. Even though Virocana recognized the demigods' plot, true to his word he parted with his crown and his life as well. (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.19.14)

Bali Conquers the Heavens

Enraged at the demigods' intrigue, Bali, son of Virocana, became an avowed adversary of the demigods, the ruthless slayers of his father. Once, when Indra, king of the demigods, had haughtily rejected a garland offered by a sage, the sage had cursed the demigods. As a result of this curse, Bali easily defeated the demigods in battle and won the kingdom of heaven.

The demigods were at a disadvantage: The demons were fearless of death because their preceptor Śukrācārya could revive them from the dead with a secret mantra. Chased from their abodes, the demigods surrendered to Lord Viṣṇu, who told them to churn the milk ocean in a truce with the demons. The churning would recover jewels that had fallen into the ocean from Bali's hands while he was transporting the treasure of the gods to his capital. The churning would also extract ambrosia, which could immortalize the demigods. (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1.9, *Matsya Purāṇa* 250–251)

The churning first produced poison, then valuable things such as gems, jewels, animals, gods, and goddesses. Finally the pot of ambrosia emerged. Lord Viṣṇu, disguised as a woman who was the embodiment of sensual beauty, deceived the demons and delivered all the ambrosia to the demigods. Empowered with the nectar of immortality, the demigods repulsed the attacking demons, who wished to secure the nectar for themselves. The demons then resorted to illusory maneuvers, bewildering the demigods.

The demigods took shelter of Lord Viṣṇu, who effortlessly thwarted the demons' tricks. With the Lord on their side, the demigods killed Bali. Taking advantage of the ailing demon army, the demigods began mercilessly massacring them. Then Nārada Muni, the sage among the demigods, forbade them to continue the carnage. He advised them to return to their heavenly kingdom. He told the demons to take their dead emperor, Bali, to Śukrācarya, who revived all the dead demons whose limbs were intact.

When Bali was revived, under the guidance of Śukrācārya he performed a sacrifice for universal conquest. He thus obtained an invincible bow, impenetrable armor, two inexhaustible quivers, and a golden chariot led by fine horses and bearing a splendid flag. His grandfather gave him an ever-fresh garland, and his teacher gave him a victory conch shell. After receiving these gifts and blessings, Bali charged toward Indra's capital and attacked with full force. Indra and the other demigods hid. Blessed by his teacher, Bali reigned over heaven. Following the good counsel of his grandfather Prahlāda, Bali ruled virtuously. (*Vāmana Purāṇa* 74–75).

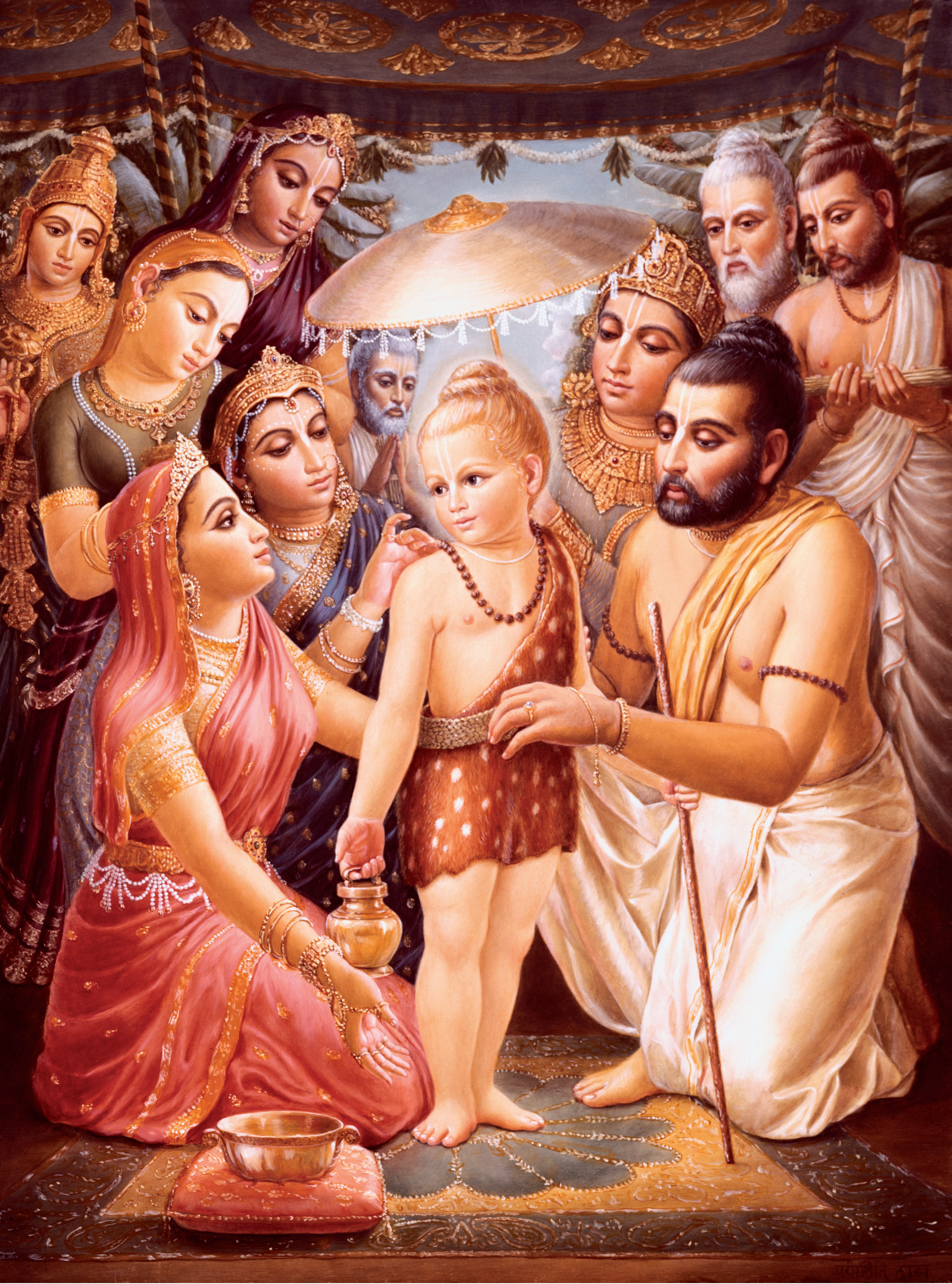
Vāmanadeva Appears

Aditi, the mother of the demigods, lamented upon seeing her sons wandering homeless. Her husband, Kaśyapa, advised her to stay calm in both loss and gain, but he could not pacify her. He then recommended that she perform a twelve-day vow to satisfy Lord Kṛṣṇa. Pleased with her vow, the Lord promised to appear as her son. In trance, Kaśyapa saw the Lord. He then impregnated his wife, and the Lord entered her womb.

The blue-hued Lord Vāmana appeared in this world adorned

After appearing in His original form as Lord Viṣṇu, with ornaments and weapons, Lord Vāmana accepts the form of a brāhmaṇa*-dwarf and receives gifts from His parents and other great personalities of the universe.*

Painting by Parikṣit Dāsa



with golden silk and holding in His four hands a conch shell, a disc, a club, and a lotus. His appearance brought joy to all creation.

He then transformed into a dwarf *brāhmaṇa* boy, and at His birthday ceremony all the demigods and sages presented Him gifts. The sun-god chanted Vedic mantras, the priest of the demigods decorated His chest with the sacred thread, and Kaśyapa Muni put a straw belt around His waist. Mother Earth and His own mother provided Him a deerskin and a loincloth. The Moon (king of the forests) offered Him the rod of a celibate, and the heavens furnished an umbrella. Brahmā supplied a water pot, the seven sages handed Him sacred grass, and the goddess of learning equipped Him with prayer beads. The treasurer of the demigods gave a begging pot, and Bhagavati, Lord Śiva's wife, gave Him His first alms.

Vāmanadeva Begs from Bali

Śrī Vāmanadeva performed fire sacrifices to set the proper example for all sages. When he heard that King Bali was engaged in sacrifice under the guidance of Śukrācārya, He went to see Bali, pressing down the surface of the globe with every step.

When Vāmanadeva approached Bali, the sacrificial fire was nearly extinguished, the demons couldn't receive their shares of sacrifice, and the hymns emanating from the mouths of the sages empowered the demigods instead of the demons. (*Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa* 45.10–13) All the sages at the sacrifice were stunned to see the radiance emanating from Vāmanadeva. They thought the sun or fire incarnate was approaching, and they all offered their respects to Him. Bali Mahārāja, cordially seating Him, washed His lotus feet. The great king then placed upon his head the sacred water sanctified by touching the Lord's lotus feet, just as Lord Śiva carries in his hair the holy Ganges. Mahārāja Bali then asked the Lord how he could serve Him.

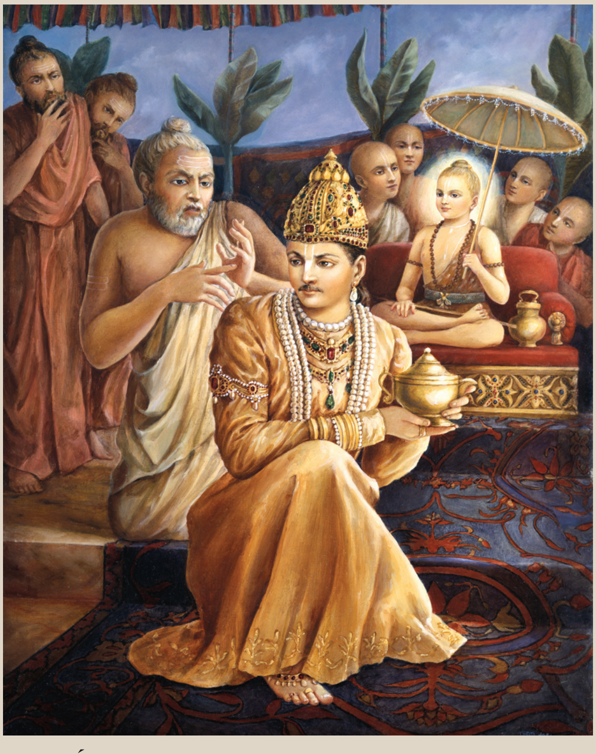
After praising Bali's dynasty as glorious and unfailing in its vows of charity and chivalry, Vāmana asked him for only three paces of land. Bali Mahārāja derided His decision as immature and insisted He ask for something more substantial. Vāmanadeva replied that greed can never be satiated; it will drive the

Śukrācārya's Reformation

WHEN, TO SEAL his oath, Bali was about to pour water into Vāmandeva's hands, Śukrācārya reduced his body in size, entered the vessel, and blocked the hole from which the stream would come out. As if to remove the small blockage, Vāmanadeva inserted a straw into the hole and struck the eye of Śukrācārya, who left in utter pain. The water then flowed freely into the lotus hands of Lord Vāmana. (*Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa* 45.34–37).

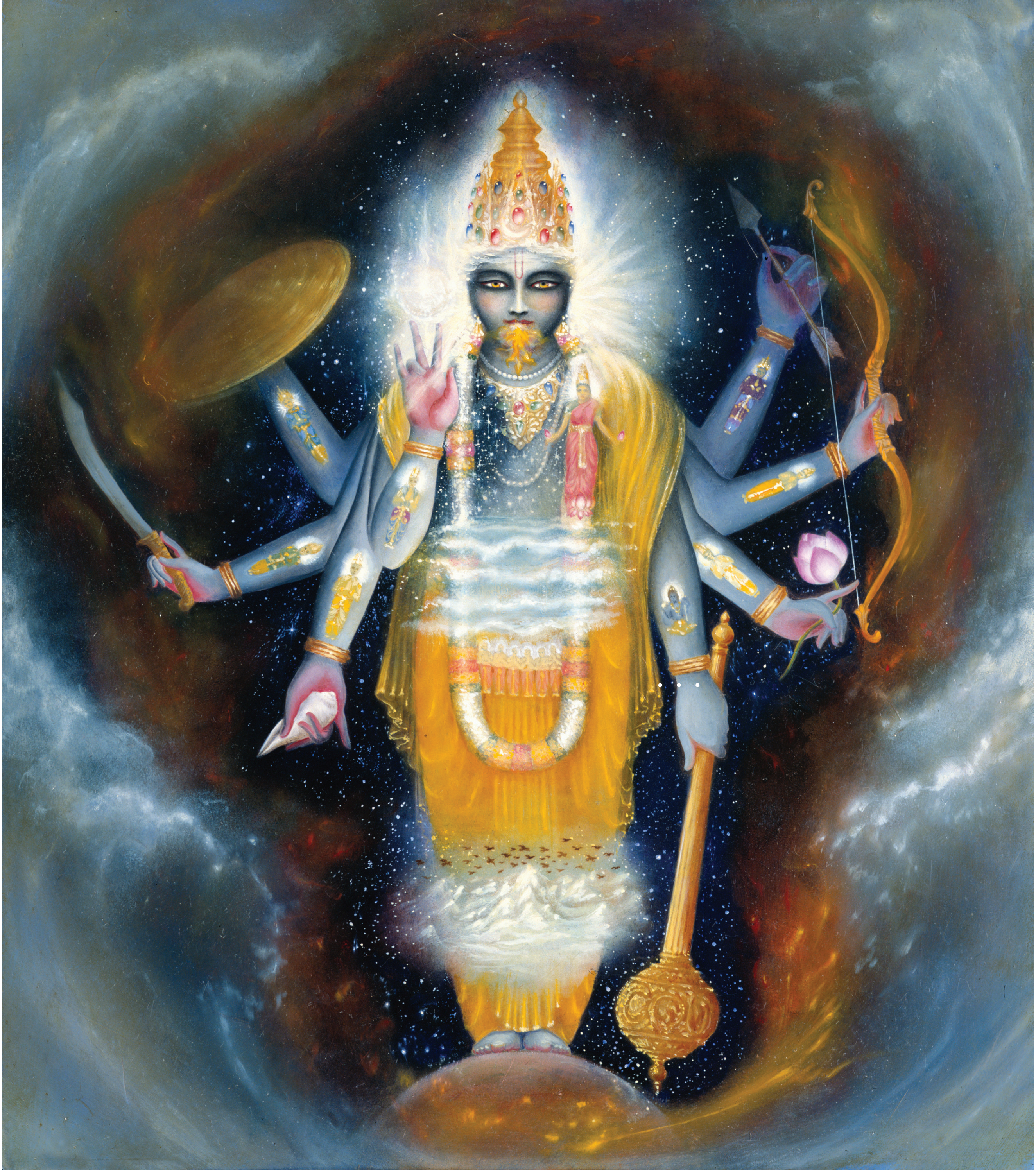
To repent his mistake, Śukrācārya performed austerities by standing in the Ganges River with upraised hands, his mind concentrated on Lord Vāmana. He recited prayers in honor of the Lord, who appeared on the scene and asked why He had been prayed to. Śukrācārya begged forgiveness from the Lord for trying to dissuade Bali from following the Lord's wish. The Lord then touched His conch shell to Śukrācārya's cracked eye, instantly healing it. In this way Śukrācārya was pardoned for his offense. (*Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa* 55.1–20)

After Bali was granted kingship in the Sutala planet, Vāmandeva asked Śukrācārya why he had cursed Bali, his disciple. What was Bali's flaw? Śukrācārya admitted that because Bali had satisfied the Yajña Puruṣa, the original and foremost beneficiary of all sacrifices, Bali's character was indeed faultless. Anyone who sincerely desires to please the Supreme Lord is to be considered pure, even if there may be some mistakes in his worship. Just by chanting the Lord's name, everything becomes auspicious. Speaking thus, Śukrācārya duly complied with the Lord's desire to return the heavens to the demigods. (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.23.14–18).



Painting by Dhṛti Devī Dāsī

Śukrācārya tries to stop his disciple Bali from consecrating His vow to give Lord Vāmana three paces of land.


Painting by Jayarāma Dāsa

Before taking His first step, Lord Vāmana expands to reveal His universal form.

possessor to run after more.

In effect, Vāmanadeva was instructing Bali Mahārāja that his kingship over heaven was only satisfying his selfish greed and tormenting the demigods. As the supreme warrior, the Lord could have easily regained the heavens for the demigods by vanquishing Bali's pride in battle, but He came as a boy sage to instruct His devotee Bali Mahārāja about giving up excessive attachment to proprietorship. The Lord instructed Bali that one should be satisfied with whatever one owns by the will of providence, and not hanker for others' property.

Bali then agreed to grant the Lord three paces of land. Just as he was about to confirm his promise with water, Śukrācarya, recognizing Vāmanadeva as Lord Viṣṇu Himself, tried to dissuade Bali from fulfilling his promise. Bali maintained Śukrācarya, who did not want his rich benefactor to lose all his wealth. He informed Bali that the boy in front of him was actually the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu, who had come to retrieve all the opulence of the demigods.

Śukrācarya also warned Bali that he would suffer in hell for failing to fulfill his promise to Lord Vāmana, since Lord Vāmana would cover Bali's entire kingdom (the universe) with two steps, not leaving any space for a third step. Bali had not yet uttered *oṁ,* so in fact, said Śukrācarya, his promise could be revoked.

Bali was not prepared to go back on his word, however. He knew that Mother Earth cannot bear the weight of a dishonest person. Now that the Lord Himself had come to his door, how could he go against His supreme will? Though not abiding by the guru's orders would ordinarily be an offense, Bali rejected his guru's advice because it contradicted with the principle of satisfying the Lord.

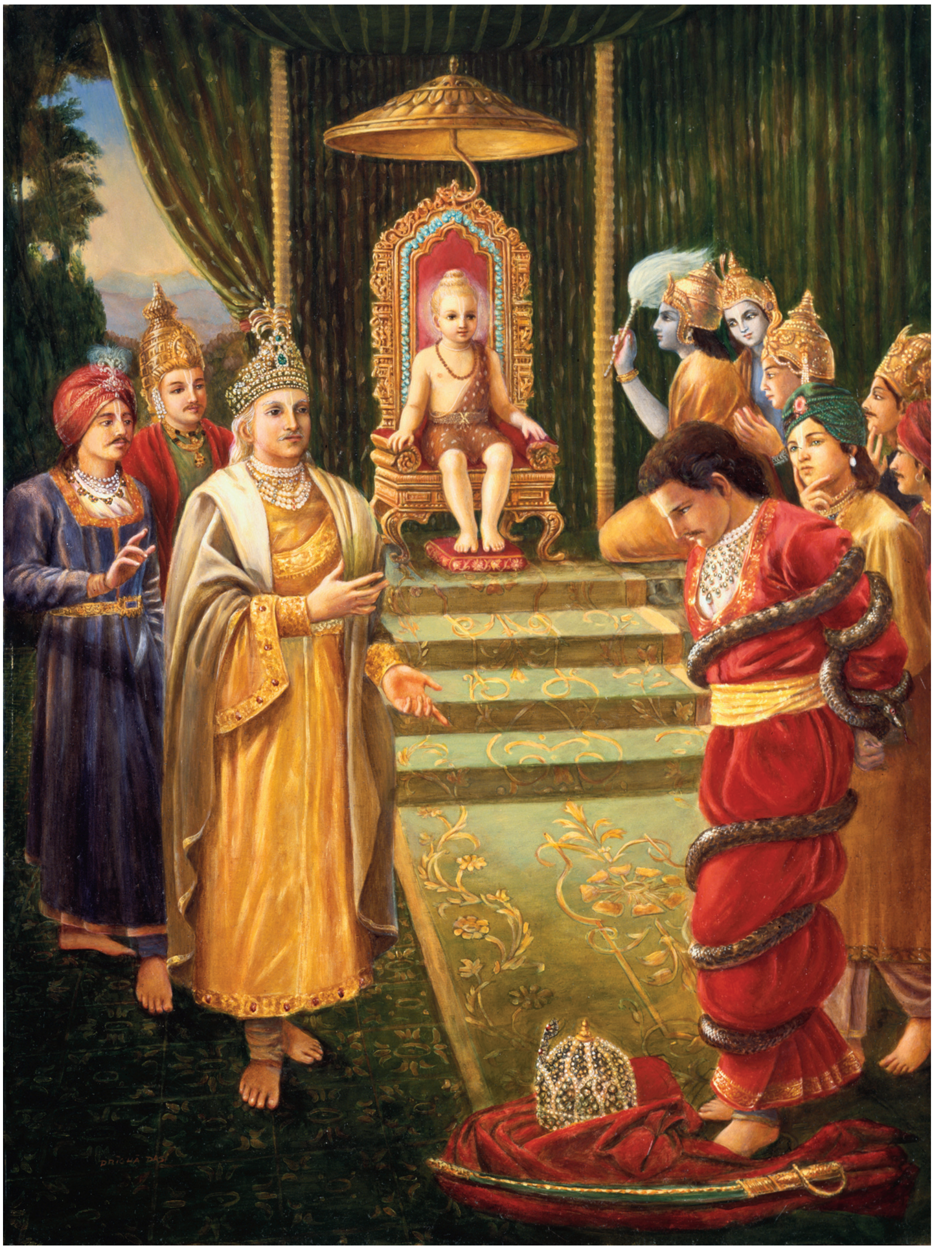
As for hell, Bali Mahārāja said, "I do not fear hell, poverty, an ocean of distress, falldown from my position, or even death itself as much as I fear cheating a *brāhmaṇa.*"

He cited the examples of great souls who sacrificed their lives for others. After all, death takes away everything, so why be attached to one's possessions?

Bali continued: "Many kings have attained immortal fame by their heroic deeds, but rarely do they obtain the fortune to serve a saint. And my fortune is beyond limit, for the husband of the goddess of fortune has come as a saint to beg from me. My dear teacher, you yourself worship Viṣṇu, and now that He has appeared before me, I must carry out His instruction, even though He may have come as an enemy. Since He is now a *brāhmaṇa* boy, I will not fight with Him, though He may arrest or kill me." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.20.12)

On hearing this, Śukrācārya condemned his disobedient disciple to lose all his wealth.

Even after being cursed, Bali offered water to Vāmanadeva, thus solidifying his promise. Śukrācarya tried to intervene, but was unable to do so. [See sidebar: "Śukrācarya's Reformation."]



Painting by Dīrghā Devī Dāsī

Unable to fulfill his vow to grant Lord Vāmana three paces of land, Bali Mahārāja, bound by a snake rope, is brought before the Lord for judgment.

Though appearing as a dwarf, the Lord expanded into His cosmic form, revealing the entire universe. With His first step He covered all the lower planets up to the earth, and with His second He reached all the way to the top of the universe. His toenail pierced the universal coverings, and the water of the Causal Ocean (in which countless universes float) surged in, washed the Lord's lotus feet, and descended into our universe as the celestial Ganges. (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 5.17.1)

The twelfth-century poet and devotee Jayadeva Gosvāmī writes:

chalayasi vikramaṇe balim adbhuta-
vāmana
pada-nakha-nīra-janita-jana-pāvana
keśava dhṛta-vāmana-rūpa
jaya jagadīśa hare

"O Keśava! O Lord of the universe! O Lord Hari, who have assumed the form of a dwarf-*brāhmaṇa*! All glories to You! O wonderful dwarf, by Your massive steps You deceive King Bali, and by the Ganges water that has emanated from the nails of Your lotus feet, You deliver all living beings within this world."

The Ganges water also contains water from Lord Brahma's water pot with which he bathed and worshiped the Lord's lotus foot when it extended up to the highest planetary system. (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.21.4)

Vāmanadeva then revealed Himself again as a young sage, and all the demigods worshiped Him. The demons, on the other hand, charged the Lord, but they were slain by the His powerful associates. Bali Mahārāja ordered his soldiers to desist from warfare, proclaiming that the supreme time factor was now not in their favor. No one can go against the will of the Supreme Lord, he announced.

The demon soldiers returned to their residences in the lower planets. Garuḍa, the eagle carrier of Lord Viṣṇu, then arrested Bali Mahārāja with snake ropes, and the Lord rebuked Bali for failing to offer three paces of land. For that failure he would have to live in hell.

The Lord took away everything from Bali, except his free will. God can take anything from us, but He never takes our free will; we always have the choice of whether or not to surrender to Him.

To fulfill his promise, Bali then surrendered himself at the lotus feet of the Lord and asked Him to place the third step on his head. For this deed, Bali is famed as the exemplar of full surrender unto the Lord.

In fact, Bali considered the Lord's actions more merciful to himself than to Indra. Indra would certainly regain his opulence and kingdom, but by being freed of false prestige, Bali had attained pure devotional service unto the Lord.

When Vāmanadeva had appeared in the womb of Aditi, Prahlāda had warned Bali that the Lord would soon defeat the demons and return the heavens to the demigods.

Bali had arrogantly challenged, "Who is this Viṣṇu compared to my demon warriors?"

Upon hearing his grandson's bombast, Prahlāda had rebuked him: "How can you speak like this? I curse you to lose your prestigious position, for you have insulted my worshipable Lord Viṣṇu."

Realizing his mistake, Bali had begged forgiveness for his pride. Though the curse could not be withdrawn, Prahlāda assured Bali that the Lord Himself would protect him. (*Vāmana Purāṇa* 77) Now Prahlāda Mahārāja honored Lord Vāmana's corrective action as beneficial for Bali, who had grown arrogant with material opulence.

In the *Śrīmad-Bhagavatam* (10.88.8–9), the Lord Himself proclaims: "If I especially favor someone, I gradually deprive him of his wealth. Then the relatives and friends of such a poverty-stricken man abandon him. In this way he suffers one distress after another. When he becomes frustrated in his attempts to make money and instead befriends My devotees, I bestow My special mercy upon him."

Bali then surrendered himself at the lotus feet of the Lord and asked Him to place the third step on his head.

Even Bali Mahārāja's wife accepted his arrest as proper, since he had claimed ownership of the property of the Lord, the original owner and controller of everything.

Bali Granted Subterranean Kingship

Lord Brahmā then entreated Vāmanadeva to release Bali, who had surrendered all his possessions to the Lord, including his own body. Vāmanadeva accepted Brahmā's request, being greatly pleased with Bali's integrity, which had remained intact even though his guru had cursed him, he'd lost his kingdom, he'd been defeated and arrested, and his friends and relatives had rejected him. Lord Vāmana blessed Mahārāja Bali to obtain the post of Indra in a later millennium. Till then he would rule as king in a subterranean planet designed by the architect of the gods to be a hundred times more resplendent than heaven. (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.22.32–33) Lord Vāmana Himself guarded Bali's kingdom.

Bali and Prahlāda praised the Lord with deep affection. They noted that even the demigods had never achieved the causeless mercy He had shown the demons. Then the Lord returned all the lands He had taken from Bali Mahārāja to their original owners—Indra and the demigods.

Indra and Bali: Both Devotees Satisfied

The Lord often acts in unpredictably wondrous ways, but His pastimes always set the true dharma for the benefit of everyone. Vāmanadeva's recovering the heavens from Bali and delivering them to the demigods benefited both Indra and Bali. They both obtained their kingdoms, but also something of much higher value: deep trust and love for Vāmanadeva, who fulfilled double roles as Indra's younger brother and Bali's protector.

This pastime also glorifies Bali Mahārāja's unwavering resolve to fulfill his vow in any circumstance. Bali Mahārāja is one of the twelve great personalities (*mahājanas*) revered for their exclusive devotion to the Lord even in the most trying situations. ✿

Aja Govinda Dāsa, a disciple of His Holiness Hanumatpreśaka Swami, is pursuing a Ph.D. in artificial intelligence at Oxford with a Clarendon scholarship.

The author thanks the Oxford Center for Hindu Studies for providing the referenced scriptures not published by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

In your own

What was most memorable about your first Hare Kṛṣṇa feast?

I was hungry and looking for God,

and my friend said, "Let's go to the Kṛṣṇa temple."

"Who?" I said.

And so we headed off to the Hare Kṛṣṇa temple at 1400 Cherry St., Denver, Colorado, in the spring of 1971. I walked in the front door, and there they were, chanting and dancing.

"No," my friend said, "those are the Pentecostals. They're moving out. The Kṛṣṇas are downstairs."

So we walked around the building, went downstairs, and there they were, chanting and dancing—and breaking *mṛdaṅgas*!

It was the play "Lord Caitanya and Chand Kazi," in which Lord Caitanya performs an act of civil disobedience by flouting the Muslim magistrate's ban on the public chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa.

The devotee actors were so absorbed in their parts and the audience was so intrigued that we happily joined the "protest" *kīrtana* and laughed and danced and took part in the celebration feast.

The exciting drama had captured us, and whether we knew it or not, we had all joined the *saṅkīrtana* movement of Lord Caitanya.

Candraśekhara Dāsa
Denver, Colorado

It was a cold, chilly winter evening.

After a lecture by a senior devotee, all the assembled people went to the rooftop of the house to receive *prasādam.* It was freezing, but the *prasādam* was served absolutely hot, and it was so beautifully cooked. That was two or three years ago, but I still remember exactly how the *prasādam* tasted.

Biswashree Dey
Gurgaon, India

On a Sunday in May

1985, I was working in Tyler, Texas, and my coworkers decided to go to Six Flags in Dallas, three hours away. I asked them to drop me at the Hare Kṛṣṇa temple in the morning and pick me up later at night. When they did, it was too late—the chanting, *gulabjamuns*, sweet rice, and *pakoras* (what to speak of Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami's preaching) were powerful enough for me to stay in Dallas for three months. I never went back "home," and even though my devotion leaves much to be desired, on that day Kṛṣṇa entered my heart and never left.

Caitanya Nṛsiṁha Dāsa
San Antonio, Texas

I was a seventeen-year-old flower child in 1971,

living in the Rocky Mountains with a group of hippies. A few of us came down to Boulder one Sunday, and they brought me to the Hare Kṛṣṇa temple so we could get some free food.

In our eagerness we arrived early. The devotees (there were only five) were busy preparing for

Viśākhā Devī Dāsī

words . . .

Pentip photographer: Andrea Leone | Agency: Dreamstime.com

the large crowd. Someone asked me to make a flower garland for Subhadrā. Of course, I didn't even know what a deity was. I was shown this small yellow smiling figure on the altar. I smiled back at her.

I was asked to go pick some flowers and sew them on a string. This made sense to me. Subhadrā would want to wear flowers, since we flower children always did. So I happily went about this task and gave the garland to one of the devotees.

The crowds started arriving, and the chanting began. I looked at the altar, and there between a white smiling figure and a black smiling figure stood smiling Subhadrā, wearing the garland I had made her. She was glowing.

And so was I. I don't remember what the "free food" was that day, but I felt good in my heart, as I had experienced my first taste of devotional service by Subhadrā Devī's mercy. And I wanted more.

Kamalāvatī Dāsī
Wheeling, West Virginia

It was not only the feast, but the entire program

of lecture, questions and answers, and—wow!—the delicious vegetarian feast. It was like something I had been waiting years for.

I had started on a vegetarian diet the year before, so after meeting some Hare Kṛṣṇas and being enlightened with the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, I began to wonder what I'd done to deserve such mercy.

It has been more than fifteen years since my first Hare Kṛṣṇa Sunday feast, and I am eternally grateful to the devotee (who passed away some years ago) for asking me, "Do you know the name *Kṛṣṇa*?"

Ian Lubsey
Kingston, Jamaica

When I first went

to an ISKCON temple for a Sunday feast, I was thinking, "Every Indian temple serves *prasādam,* so what's so special about this place?"

Later, when I was served *prasādam,* I was dumbstruck. I had never tasted anything more delicious in my entire life. Surely it was actual *prasādam*—mercy from the Lord. Because of that mercy, I am now striving to be a devotee and a servant of guru and Gaurāṅga.

Karishma Patel
Hyderabad, India

My first Hare Krishna feast was wonderful.

It was the Festival of the Chariots in Orlando, Florida (2006). I was going through a rough time in my life. I'd been introduced to Kṛṣṇa in 2003 and was going to the Orlando temple fairly regularly. I was working on my bad habits and trying my hardest to eat vegetarian. But I was not living right, so I drifted away from Kṛṣṇa. Fortunately for me, I had a devotee friend who kept me updated on events.

I loved the festival. During the procession it started to rain heavily. A bunch of us ended up on side streets under awnings. Eventually, a devotee in a white van took us back to Lake Eola, where the festivities were going on.

I have many photos of the festival, and I can look at them and hope that I have made some progress, as my living situation has improved. A lot of things still need improvement in my life, but at least I am not acting in ways I was in the past.

Allison Tucker
Jacksonville, Florida

My first Hare Kṛṣṇa feast

was during Deepawali in 2007 at the Akurdi (Pune) ISKCON temple. The feast was prepared by the *brahmacārīs.* As a nutritionist, I noted that the *prasādam,* besides being spiritual, contained the six essential nutrients: carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and moisture. I experienced it to be scientifically balanced. Having been offered to Lord Kṛṣṇa, the *prasādam* turned out to be energetic. A congregation of three hundred to four hundred people felt highly empowered by positive thoughts, as evidenced by their cheerful expressions.

Raman Rao, Nutritionist
G. B. Pant University
Pantnagar, India

I came to know about Hare Kṛṣṇa feasts

for the first time when I read the book *Prabhupāda.* I prayed I would get an opportunity to taste such nice *prasādam* offered to the Lord.

On January 1, 2006, my brother and sister and I decided to visit some temples of Guwahati. I thought, "Why not visit the ISKCON temple,

HERE'S THE NEXT QUESTION:

What would you say to a devotee who's considering giving up the practices of Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

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where beautiful deities are there to bless all of us.”

I wanted to spend some time in a devotional environment instead of roaming around. I went there just to offer respects to the deities. I never expected a full meal. At that time I didn’t know much about ISKCON or *prasādam.* After the end of the chanting session and the *Bhagavad-gītā* class, we were about to return home when a devotee requested us to have *prasādam.* I thanked the devotee and Lord Kṛṣṇa for fulfilling my desire. I felt as if I had come to Kṛṣṇa’s house and just like a loving host He had seated us and offered us a nice meal. I felt blessed.

Prabhupāda said that we receive the Lord’s mercy directly through *prasādam.* Such a nice way to develop spirituality! From that time I always offer my food first to the Lord and then take it as *prasādam* so that I can purify my material existence, and I tell others to do the same.

Nabanita Choudhury
Guwahati, India

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The Mayapur Institute for Higher Education and Training,
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2009 Gaura Pūrṇimā Courses

Feb. 12–23—GBC meetings.
Feb. 15–20—*VTE Teacher Training Course 1,* Atul Kṛṣṇa Dāsa.
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Feb. 24–27—*Varṇāśrama Mission: Make Vṛndāvana Villages,* Bhakti Rāghava Swami, Bhakti Dhīra Dāmodara Swami, Varṇāśrama Research Team.
Feb. 24–27—*Yoga Therapy Introduction: Being Fit to Serve Kṛṣṇa Better,* Prāṇanātha Dāsa. Men only.
Feb. 24–27—*Tools for Mending Broken Relationships,* Vrajalīlā Devī Dāsī.
Feb. 24–Mar. 2—*VTE Teacher Training Course 2,* Atul Kṛṣṇa Dāsa.
Feb. 25–Mar. 2—*VTE Leadership /Management,* Anuttama Dāsa.
Feb. 28–Mar. 10—*Yoga Therapy Practices: Being Fit to Serve Kṛṣṇa Better,* Prāṇanātha Dāsa. Men only.
Mar. 7–10—*Ayurvedic Self-Healing,* Dr. Liladhar Gupta.
Mar. 7–10—*VTE Śāstric Study Teacher Training Course,* Atul Kṛṣṇa Dāsa.
Mar. 11—Gaura Pūrṇimā.

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*Vaishnava Training and Education
**This is a pilot version of the new VTE Bhakti-śāstrī Course, developed by the Mayapur Institute’s Curriculum Development Team.
†Before entering these course modules, students will complete a Preliminary Home Self-Study Unit, available on CD at the MIHET table or office, or on the MIHET website (http://www.mihet.org).

The memory of my first Sunday Love Feast

is as vivid today as it was when I first stepped into that humble Vancouver temple back in the summer of ’71. It was by far my most intense experience ever, one that was to change my life forever.

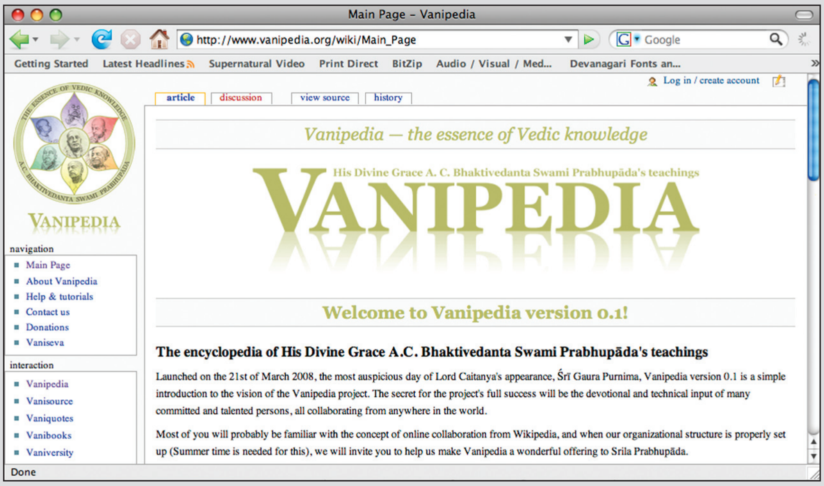
Upon entering the brightly colored blue and saffron second-story loft, nestled in the dull industrial city landscape, I felt transported into another dimension of reality and beauty. The intensely attractive sights, sounds, and smells of this amazingly effulgent spiritual oasis excited all my senses. And the half dozen devotees scurrying about in preparation for the Love Feast were all so very sincere and so kind to me. I just dove into the *kīrtana* and was blown away by the delicious *prasādam.*

After my third Sunday feast, I became so inspired and uplifted by the devotees’ association and the miraculously sweet Love Feasts that I finally decided to join them for good, only six weeks after my first encounter. I remain eternally grateful to the Lord’s devotees for their matchless hospitality and mercy upon me.

Gokulānanda Dāsa
Vancouver, Canada

e-Krishna

Profiles of Kṛṣṇa-related websites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Vanipedia — the essence of Vedic knowledge

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda's teachings

VANIPEDIA

Welcome to Vanipedia version 0.1!

The encyclopedia of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda's teachings

Launched on the 21st of March 2008, the most auspicious day of Lord Caitanya's appearance, Śrī Gaura Purnima, Vanipedia version 0.1 is a simple introduction to the vision of the Vanipedia project. The secret for the project's full success will be the devotional and technical input of many committed and talented persons, all collaborating from anywhere in the world.

Most of you will probably be familiar with the concept of online collaboration from Wikipedia, and when our organizational structure is properly set up (Summer time is needed for this), we will invite you to help us make Vanipedia a wonderful offering to Srila Prabhupāda.

Vanipedia and VEDA—

E-learning just got easier with access to two transcendental websites. Vanipedia, by Viṣṇu Mūrti Dāsa and his team, is a valuable website for studying Śrīla Prabhupāda books and teachings. The first stage is online now. VEDA: Vedic Knowledge Online, managed by Bhakta Jan Mares, is the largest, most comprehensive online encyclopedia of the Vedic world. These two inspiring resources are the work of committed and innovative devotees.

Vanipedia

Vanipedia is designed to be a dynamic, interactive encyclopedia of all of Śrīla Prabhupāda's words.

"It's a resource for any spiritual or devotional seeker," says Viṣṇu Mūrti Dāsa, "and a vast library of profound knowledge."

The website is a work in progress. It's designed as a lotus flower with six petals: Vanibooks, Vaniquotes, Vaniversity, Vanimedia, Vanisource, and Vanictionary. Devotees from around the planet are volunteering to collaborate on completing each section.

"The key to the project's full success," says Viṣṇu Mūrti, "will be the devotional and technical contributions of many committed and talented people, all collaborating from anywhere in the world."

By putting the entire body of Prabhupāda's instructions at devotees' fingertips, the Vanipedia website should prove to be an extremely valuable resource in helping devotees improve their services to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Go to **www.vanipedia.org**.

VEDA: Vedic Knowledge Online

Jan Mares says that the original idea for VEDA: Vedic Knowledge Online came from his friend Varnadi, a computer programmer now living in Florida.

"It was intended to be an encyclopedia, but it expanded over time," Jan says. "It now includes an introduction to *bhakti-yoga,* an interfaith section, a download section, and a Vedic planetarium."

As an encyclopedia, VEDA is a goldmine for Vaiṣṇavas. The Library section contains unique material, some unavailable anywhere else online, including biographies of Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* and devotees, as well as seminars and study guides.

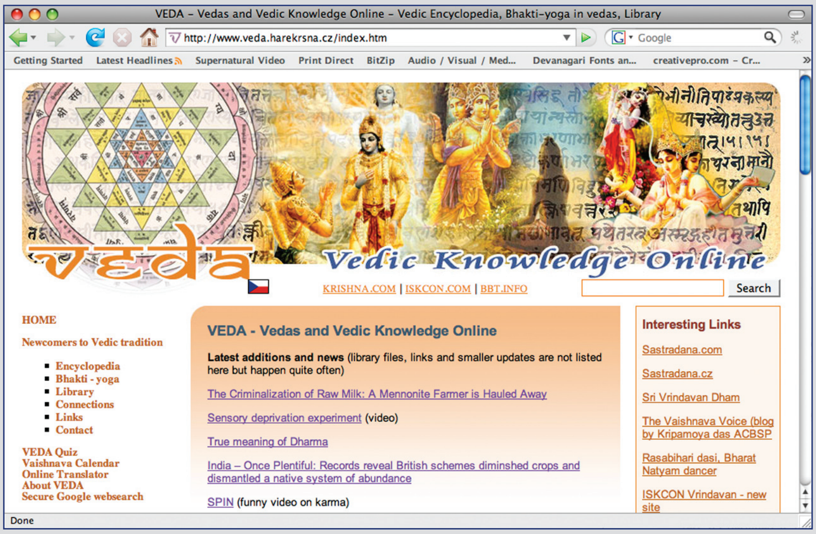
At VEDA you can test your Vedic knowledge with an online quiz, and you can download a variety of study guides to improve your understanding of the world of the Vedic literature.

Jan says his motivation in maintaining the VEDA website is to help spread Vedic knowledge in a broad way.

"When we started seven years ago," he says, "this type of information was missing online. We want to make VEDA an outstanding Vedic Vaiṣṇava resource for everyone."

Go to **www.veda.harekrsna.cz**.

—*Antony Brennan*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VEDA - Vedas and Vedic Knowledge Online

Latest additions and news (library files, links and smaller updates are not listed here but happen quite often)

The Criminalization of Raw Milk: A Mennonite Farmer is Hauled Away

Sensory deprivation experiment (video)

True meaning of Dharma

India – Once Plentiful: Records reveal British schemes diminshed crops and dismantled a native system of abundance

SPIN (funny video on karma)

Interesting Links

Sastradana.com

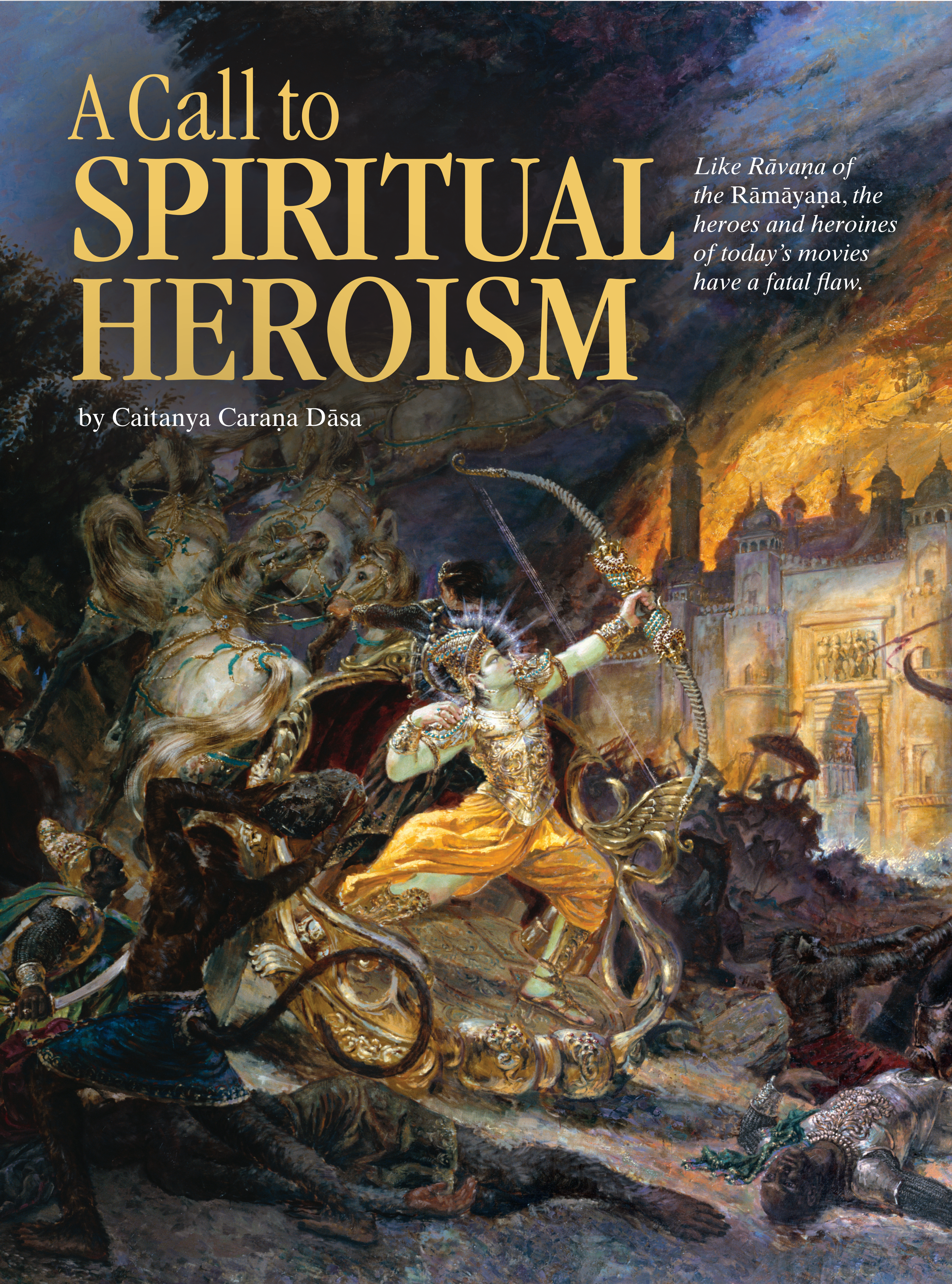
Sastradana.cz

Sri Vrindavan Dham

The Vaishnava Voice (blog by Kripamoya das ACBSP

Rasabihari dasi, Bharat Natyam dancer

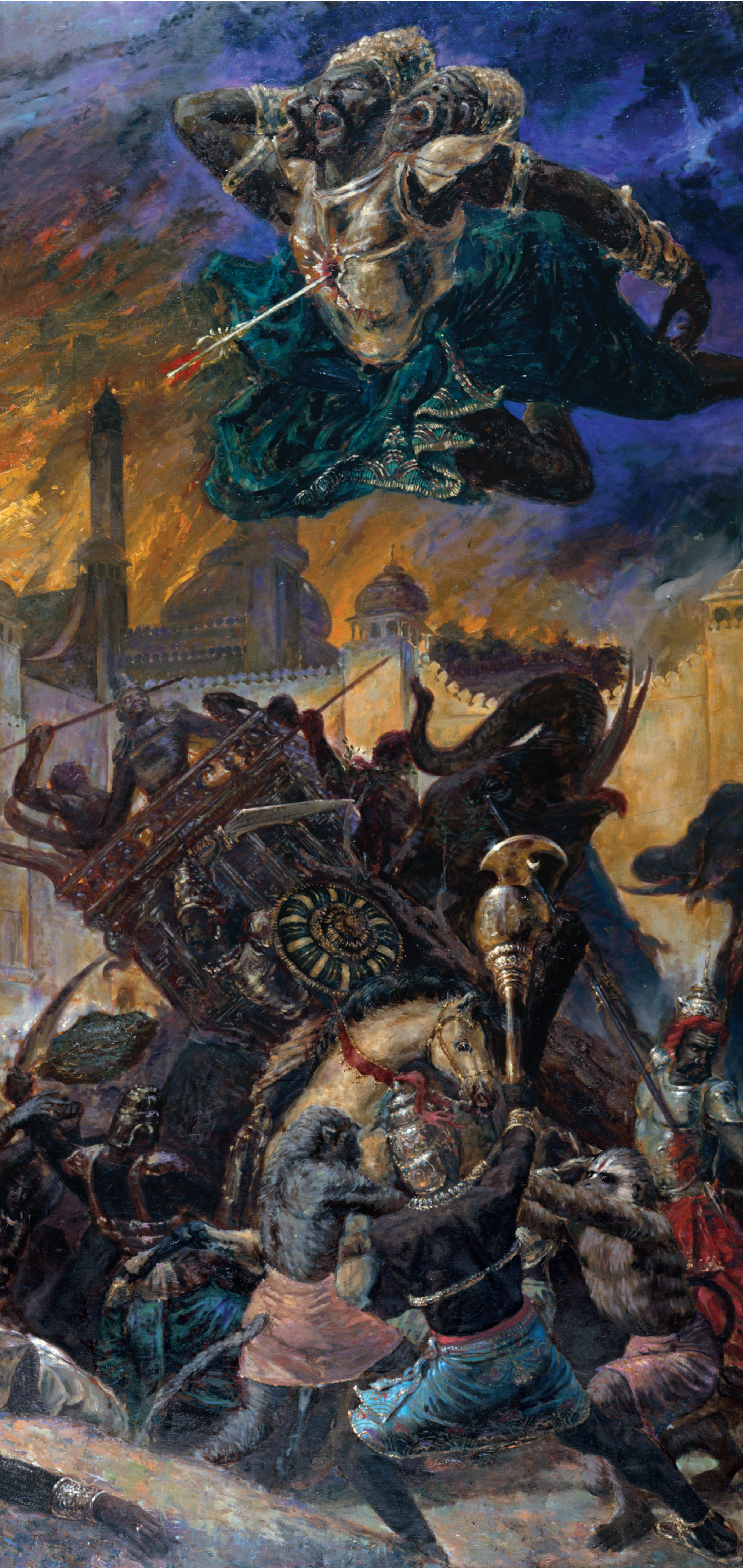
ISKCON Vrindavan - new site



A Call to SPIRITUAL HEROISM

Like Rāvaṇa of the Rāmāyaṇa, *the heroes and heroines of today's movies have a fatal flaw.*

by Caitanya Caraṇa Dāsa


Painting by Jñānāñjana Dāsa

THE *RĀMĀYAṆA* is an ancient Vedic saga of action, romance, wisdom, and adventure; a saga that has inspired a quarter of the world's population for millennia; a saga that depicts a past when beings of celestial might—both divine and demoniac—interacted on our terrestrial realm; a saga of the struggle between good and the evil; a saga in which God descends and teaches virtue, righteousness, and spirituality by His sterling personal example.

Despite the *Rāmāyaṇa's* historical antiquity, its basic storyline is similar to that of a typical movie: It features a hero, a heroine, and a villain lusting for the heroine; and it tells of an exciting confrontation between the hero and the villain, culminating in the death of the villain and the reunion of the hero and the heroine. But there is one vital difference between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and a modern movie: In a movie, the hero, the heroine, and the villain are all actually villains.

Why? Many people think of a villain as someone who enjoys by exploiting and harming others. Though not wrong, this conception of evil is incomplete and naïve, as it ignores a fundamental reality: our supremely responsible and loving father, God. Many of us never got the spiritual education needed to understand that it is God who selflessly provides us our daily food. It is true that we have to work hard to earn our living, but our effort is secondary. It's like the hard work of birds searching for grains: Without God providing the grains through nature, their search, no matter how painstaking, would be fruitless. Similarly without God's designing the miraculous mechanism of photosynthesis, which transforms "mud into mangoes"

In the Rāmāyaṇa, *a classic story of good prevailing over evil, Lord Rāma kills the wicked Rāvaṇa in the midst of an intense battle.*

(a feat far beyond the best scientist and the latest computer), we would never have any food, no matter how much we labored. All our other necessities—heat, light, air, water, health—are similarly fulfilled, primarily by divine arrangement, secondarily by human endeavor.

Unfortunately our media, culture, and education preoccupy us with so many materialistic allurements that we become blinded to the fact of our dependence on God and obligation to Him. Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, just as a healthy fear of a loving father is necessary for a naughty, restless child to become disciplined and responsible. And love of God is the culmination of wisdom, just as gratitude and love for a benevolent father shows the maturity of a grown-up child.

Sadly, however, our society fosters neither love nor fear of God, but glamorizes godless, selfish materialism instead. Consequently nowadays many people are extremely selfish in their relationship with God. They don't give even a few moments to the person who has given them their entire life. In a family, if a son doesn't care for his father, who is his link with his brothers, soon he will stop caring for them too. In fact, he may even become malevolent toward them because they become his competitors for inheritance. Similarly, selfishness in our relationship with God is the origin of all evil. We have all sown that evil seed in our own hearts and are now force-feeding each other its bitter fruits—terrorism, corruption, crime, exploitation—all born from fighting for resources, God's inheritance for us.

Divine Heroes

The *Rāmāyaṇa* gives us a glimpse of heroism and villainy, of selfless love and selfish lust. Lord Rāma and His consort, Sītā, are the eternal hero and heroine. Hanumān, the godly hero, personifies the tendency to selflessly assist the Lord in His divine love, whereas Rāvaṇa, the godless villain, personifies the tendency to selfishly grab the Lord's property for our own lust. The godly hero aspires to enjoy with God, whereas the godless villain wants to enjoy like God.

On the other hand, in a typical movie all the main characters—the hero, the heroine, and the villain—have the same evil mentality of wanting to enjoy without caring for God. In the hero and heroine, the guise of romance masks that mindset, whereas the villain expresses it without reservation. But they are all Rāvaṇas, the difference being merely in the shades of gray.

Our selfish attempts to be imitation heroes and heroines, whether in the movies or in real life, are intrinsically evil, and they fuel and fan all the greater evils we dread. Ultimately our evil boomerangs on us, for it perpetuates the illusion of our bodily misidentification, and our body subjects us to the tortures of old age, disease, death, and rebirth—again and again and again.

Of course we do not have to choke our natural urge for specialness. Like Hanumān we can all be heroes too—in service to the supreme hero. Unfortunately our society portrays the Rāvaṇa tendency as heroic and the Hanumān propensity as obsolete.

A Lesson of Hope

The *Rāmāyaṇa* reveals that Rāvaṇa, despite his extraordinary prosperity, was never satisfied but always lusty and greedy for more. Isn't that the condition of our modern civilization? All the might and wealth of Rāvaṇa could neither bring him happiness nor save him from eventual destruction. The ultimate defeat of Rāvaṇa reminds us of the destiny that awaits our society if it continues in its godless selfishness.

Still, the fall of Rāvaṇa is not just a doomsday warning; it is also a harbinger of hope and joy because it teaches us that the Lord is competent to destroy the evil within and without. The same Lord Rāma who destroyed Rāvaṇa millennia ago has reappeared as His holy name to destroy the Rāvaṇa within people's hearts. The holy name offers us real happiness, not by imitating God, but by loving God, not by becoming an imitator hero, but by becoming a servitor hero.

Caitanya Caraṇa Dāsa is a disciple of His Holiness Rādhānātha Swami. He holds a degree in electronics and telecommunications engineering and serves full time at ISKCON Pune. His free cyber magazine, The Spiritual Scientist, *gives a scientific presentation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. To subscribe, write to iyfpune@vsnl.com.*

How to Put BTG in Your Will

After providing for their families and loved ones, subscribers may want to put *Back to Godhead* in their wills, thus helping to assure the long-term future of this work. In the USA, bequests are free of estate tax and can substantially reduce the amount of your assets claimed by the government.* You can give needed support for *Back to Godhead* by simply including the following words in your will: *I give, devise, and bequeath to* Back to Godhead, *18024 NW 112th Blvd., Alachua, FL 32615* (insert amount being given here) *to be used to support* Back to Godhead *and its related activities, including the Krishna.com website.*

A bequest can be a specific dollar amount, a specific piece of property, a percentage of an estate, or all or part of the residue of an estate. You can also name BTG as a contingency beneficiary in the event someone named in your will is no longer living.

It is recommended that a lawyer help in drafting or amending a will.

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*If you live outside the USA, check the estate tax laws for your country.

Referred to as "the ripe fruit of the tree of Vedic literature," *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is the most complete and authoritative exposition of Vedic knowledge. Five thousand years ago the great sage Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa composed this *purāṇa,* or history, to explain the essence of spiritual knowledge. Here we present *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* in serialized form, with the original Sanskrit text, transliteration, word meanings, translation, and purports by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, founder-*ācārya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

DHRUVA REVEALS HIS DESIRE TO NĀRADA

Dhruva express his inability to follow Nārada Muni's advice that he tolerate the insults of his stepmother.

CANTO 4: CHAPTER 8

ध्रुव उवाच
35 सोऽयं शमो भगवता सुखदुःखहतात्मनाम्
दर्शितः कृपया पुंसां दुर्दर्शोऽस्मद्विधैस्तु यः

dhruva uvāca
so 'yaṁ śamo bhagavatā
sukha-duḥkha-hatātmanām
darśitaḥ kṛpayā puṁsām
durdarśo 'smad-vidhais tu yaḥ

dhruvaḥ uvāca—Dhruva Mahārāja said; *saḥ*—that; *ayam*—this; *śamaḥ*—equilibrium of mind; *bhagavatā*—by Your Lordship; *sukha-duḥkha*—happiness and miseries; *hata-ātmanām*—those who are affected; *darśitaḥ*—shown; *kṛpayā*—by mercy; *puṁsām*—of the people; *durdarśaḥ*—very difficult to perceive; *asmat-vidhaiḥ*—by persons like us; *tu*—but; *yaḥ*—whatever you have said.

Dhruva Mahārāja said: My dear Lord Nāradajī, for a person whose heart is disturbed by the material conditions of happiness and distress, whatever you have so kindly explained for attainment of peace of mind is certainly a very good instruction. But as far as I am concerned, I am covered by ignorance, and this kind of philosophy does not touch my heart.

PURPORT: There are various classes of men. One class is called *akāmīs,* referring to those who have no material desire. Desire must exist, either material or spiritual. Material desire arises when one wants to satisfy one's personal senses. One who is ready to sacrifice anything to satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead can be said to have spiritual desire. ① Dhruva did not accept the instruction given by the great saint Nārada because he thought himself unfit for such instruction, which prohibited all material desires. ② It is not a fact, however, that those who have material desires are prohibited from worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This is the essential instruction from the life of Dhruva. He frankly admitted that his heart was full of material desires. He was

(1) Why did Dhruva not accept Nārada's instruction?
(2) What is the essential instruction from the life of Dhruva?

very much affected by the cruel words of his stepmother, whereas those who are spiritually advanced do not care about anyone's condemnation or adoration.

In *Bhagavad-gītā* it is said that persons who are actually advanced in spiritual life do not care for the dual behavior of this material world. But Dhruva Mahārāja frankly admitted that he was not beyond the affliction of material distress and happiness. He was confident that the instruction given by Nārada was valuable, yet he could not accept it. ③ The question raised here is whether or not a person afflicted by material desires is fit to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The answer is that everyone is fit to worship Him. Even if one has many material desires to fulfill, he should take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and worship the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is so merciful that He fulfills everyone's desires. Through this narration it will become very clear that no one is barred from worshiping the Supreme Personality of Godhead, even if one has many material desires.

36 अथापि मेऽविनीतस्य क्षात्त्रं घोरमुपेयुषः
सुरुच्या दुर्वचोबाणैर्न भिन्ने श्रयते हृदि

athāpi me 'vinītasya
kṣāttraṁ ghoram upeyuṣaḥ
surucyā durvaco-bāṇair
na bhinne śrayate hṛdi

atha api—therefore; *me*—my; *avinītasya*—not very submissive; *kṣāttram*—the spirit of a *kṣatriya; ghoram*—intolerant; *upeyuṣaḥ*—achieved; *surucyāḥ*—of Queen Suruci; *durvacaḥ*—harsh words; *bāṇaiḥ*—by the arrows; *na*—not; *bhinne*—being pierced; *śrayate*—remain in; *hṛdi*—the heart.

My dear lord, I am very impudent for not accepting your instructions, but this is not my fault. ④ It is due to my having been born in a kṣatriya family. My stepmother, Suruci, has pierced my heart with her harsh words. Therefore your valuable instruction does not stand in my heart.

(3) Is a person afflicted by material desires fit to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead?
(4) What did Dhruva say was the reason he was unable to accept Nārada's instructions?
(5) What are the four kinds of human spirit, as implied by Dhruva in reply to Nārada?
(6) What is the duty of the spiritual master or teacher regarding a boy's "psychological movement"?
(7) How does the Vedic classification of society resemble a body?
(8) Why is human society now topsy-turvy?

PURPORT: It is said that the heart or mind is just like an earthen pot; once broken, it cannot be repaired by any means. Dhruva Mahārāja gave this example to Nārada Muni. He said that his heart, having been pierced by the arrows of his stepmother's harsh words, felt so broken that nothing seemed valuable but his desire to counteract her insult. His stepmother had said that because he was born from the womb of Sunīti, a neglected queen of Mahārāja Uttānapāda, Dhruva Mahārāja was not fit to sit either on the throne or on his father's lap. In other words, according to his stepmother, he could not be declared king. Dhruva Mahārāja's determination, therefore, was to become king of a planet exalted even beyond that possessed by Lord Brahmā, the greatest of all the demigods.

⑤ Dhruva Mahārāja indirectly informed the great sage Nārada that there are four kinds of human spirit—the brahminical spirit, the *kṣatriya* spirit, the *vaiśya* spirit, and the *śūdra* spirit. The spirit of one caste is not applicable to the members of another. The philosophical spirit enunciated by Nārada Muni might have been suitable for a *brāhmaṇa* spirit, but it was not suitable for a *kṣatriya.* Dhruva frankly admitted that he was lacking in brahminical humility and was therefore unable to accept the philosophy of Nārada Muni.

The statements of Dhruva Mahārāja indicate that unless a child is trained according to his tendency, there is no possibility of his developing his particular spirit. ⑥ It was the duty of the spiritual master or teacher to observe the psychological movement of a particular boy and thus train him in a particular occupational duty. Dhruva Mahārāja, having already been trained in the *kṣatriya* spirit, would not accept the brahminical philosophy. In America we have practical experience of this incompatibility of the brahminical and *kṣatriya* temperaments. The American boys, who have simply been trained as *śūdras,* are not at all fit to fight in battle. Therefore, when they are called to join the military, they refuse because they do not have *kṣatriya* spirit. This is a cause of great dissatisfaction in society.

That the boys do not have the *kṣatriya* spirit does not mean that they are trained in brahminical qualities; they are trained as *śūdras,* and thus in frustration they are becoming hippies. However, as soon as they enter the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement being started in America, they are trained to meet the brahminical qualifications, even though they have fallen to the lowest conditions as *śūdras.* In other words, since the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is open for everyone, people in general can attain the brahminical qualifications. This is the greatest need at the present moment, for now there are actually no *brāhmaṇas* or *kṣatriyas* but only some *vaiśyas* and, for the most part, *śūdras.* The classification of society into *brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas,* and *śūdras* is very scientific. ⑦ In the human social body, the *brāhmaṇas* are considered the head, the *kṣatriyas* are the arms, the *vaiśyas* are the belly, and the *śūdras* are the legs. ⑧ At the present moment the body has legs and a belly, but there are no arms or head, and therefore society is topsy-turvy. It is necessary to reestablish the brahminical qualifications in order to raise the fallen human society to the highest standard of spiritual consciousness.

37 पदं त्रिभुवनोत्कृष्टं जिगीषोः साधु वर्त्म मे
ब्रूह्यस्मत्पितृभिर्ब्रह्मन्नन्यैरप्यनधिष्ठितम्

padaṁ tri-bhuvanotkṛṣṭaṁ
jigīṣoḥ sādhu vartma me
brūhy asmat-pitṛbhir brahmann
anyair apy anadhiṣṭhitam

padam—position; *tri-bhuvana*—the three worlds; *utkṛṣṭam*—the best; *jigīṣoḥ*—desirous; *sādhu*—honest; *vartma*—way; *me*—unto me; *brūhi*—please tell; *asmat*—our; *pitṛbhiḥ*—by the forefathers, the father, and grandfather; *brahman*—O great *brāhmaṇa; anyaiḥ*—by others; *api*—even; *anadhiṣṭhitam*—not acquired.

O learned brāhmaṇa, I want to occupy a position more exalted than any yet achieved within the three worlds by anyone, even by my fathers and grandfathers. If you will oblige, kindly advise me of an honest path to follow by which I can achieve the goal of my life.

PURPORT: When Dhruva Mahārāja refused to accept the brahminical instruction of Nārada Muni, naturally the next question would be what sort of instruction he wanted. So even before Nārada Muni asked, Dhruva Mahārāja expressed his heartfelt desire. His father, of course, was the emperor of the entire world, and his grandfather, Lord Brahmā, was the creator of the universe. ⑨ Dhruva Mahārāja expressed his desire to possess a kingdom better than those of his father and grandfather. He frankly stated that he wanted a kingdom which had no competitor within the three worlds, namely the higher, middle, and lower planetary systems. The greatest personality within this universe is Lord Brahmā, and Dhruva Mahārāja wanted a position even greater than his. ⑩ He wanted to take advantage of Nārada Muni's presence because he knew very well that if Nārada Muni, the greatest devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa, could bless him or show him the path, then certainly he would be able to occupy a more exalted position than any person within the three worlds. Thus he wanted help from Nāradajī to achieve that position. Dhruva Mahārāja wanted a position greater than that of Brahmā. This was practically an impossible proposition, but by pleasing the Supreme Personality of Godhead a devotee can achieve even the impossible.

One particular point mentioned here is that Dhruva Mahārāja wanted to occupy an exalted position not by hook or by crook, but by honest means. This indicates that if Kṛṣṇa offered him such a position, then he would accept it. That is the nature of a devotee. He may desire material gain, but he accepts it only if Kṛṣṇa offers it. Dhruva Mahārāja was sorry to refuse the instruction of Nārada Muni; therefore he requested him to be merciful to him by showing a path by which he could fulfill his mind's desires.

38 नूनं भवान् भगवतो योऽङ्गजः परमेष्ठिनः
वितुदन्नटते वीणां हिताय जगतोऽर्कवत्

nūnaṁ bhavān bhagavato
yo 'ṅgajaḥ parameṣṭhinaḥ
vitudann aṭate vīṇāṁ
hitāya jagato 'rkavat

nūnam—certainly; *bhavān*—Your Honor; *bhagavataḥ*—of the Lord; *yaḥ*—that which; *aṅga-jaḥ*—born from the body; *parameṣṭhinaḥ*—Lord Brahmā; *vitudan*—by playing on; *aṭate*—travel all over; *vīṇām*—a musical instrument; *hitāya*—for the welfare; *jagataḥ*—of the world; *arka-vat*—like the sun.

My dear lord, you are a worthy son of Lord Brahmā, and you travel, playing on your musical instrument, the vīṇā, for the welfare of the entire universe. You are like the sun, which rotates in the universe for the benefit of all living beings.

PURPORT: Dhruva Mahārāja, although a young child, expressed his hope that he might be offered the benediction of a kingdom which would exceed in opulence those of his father and grandfather. He also expressed his gladness that he had met such an exalted person as Nārada, whose only concern was to illuminate the world, like the sun, which rotates all over the universe only for the purpose of benefiting the inhabitants of all planets. Nārada Muni travels all over the universe for the sole purpose of performing the best welfare activity for the entire universe by teaching everyone how to become a devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Thus Dhruva Mahārāja felt fully assured that Nārada Muni could fulfill his desire, even though the desire was very extraordinary.

The example of the sun is very significant. ⑪ The sun is so kind that he distributes his sunshine everywhere, without consideration. Dhruva Mahārāja requested Nārada Muni to be merciful to him. He pointed out that Nārada travels all over the universe just for the purpose of doing

(9) What desire did Dhruva Mahārāja express to Nārada?
(10) Why did Dhruva believe that Nārada could fulfill his desire?
(11) Why did Dhruva compare Nārada to the sun?

good to all conditioned souls. He requested that Nārada Muni show his mercy by awarding him the benefit of his particular desire. Dhruva Mahārāja was strongly determined to fulfill his desire, and it was for that purpose that he had left his home and palace.

मैत्रेय उवाच
39 इत्युदाहृतमाकर्ण्य भगवान्नारदस्तदा
प्रीतः प्रत्याह तं बालं सद्वाक्यमनुकम्पया

maitreya uvāca
ity udāhṛtam ākarṇya
bhagavān nāradas tadā
prītaḥ pratyāha taṁ bālaṁ
sad-vākyam anukampayā

maitreyaḥ uvāca—the sage Maitreya continued; *iti*—thus; *udāhṛtam*—being spoken; *ākarṇya*—hearing; *bhagavān nāradaḥ*—the great personality Nārada; *tadā*—thereupon; *prītaḥ*—being pleased; *pratyāha*—replied; *tam*—him; *bālam*—the boy; *sat-vākyam*—good advice; *anukampayā*—being compassionate.

The sage Maitreya continued: The great personality Nārada Muni, upon hearing the words of Dhruva Mahārāja, became very compassionate toward him, and in order to show him his causeless mercy, he gave him the following expert advice.

PURPORT: Since the great sage Nārada is the foremost spiritual master, naturally his only activity is to bestow the greatest benefit upon whomever he meets. Dhruva Mahārāja, however, was a child, and so his demand was also that of a playful child. Still, the great sage became compassionate toward him, and for his welfare he spoke the following verses.

नारद उवाच
40 जनन्याभिहितः पन्थाः स वै निःश्रेयसस्य ते
भगवान् वासुदेवस्तं भज तं प्रवणात्मना

nārada uvāca
jananyābhihitaḥ panthāḥ
sa vai niḥśreyasasya te
bhagavān vāsudevas taṁ
bhaja taṁ pravaṇātmanā

(12) Why was Dhruva's desire not to be fulfilled by worshiping any demigod?
(13) Why is Nārada Muni referred to as *bhagavan?*
(14) Why did Nārada not immediately give Dhruva whatever he wanted?

nāradaḥ uvāca—the great sage Nārada said; *jananyā*—by your mother; *abhihitaḥ*—stated; *panthāḥ*—the path; *saḥ*—that; *vai*—certainly; *niḥśreyasasya*—the ultimate goal of life; *te*—for you; *bhagavān*—the Supreme Personality of Godhead; *vāsudevaḥ*—Kṛṣṇa; *tam*—unto Him; *bhaja*—render your service; *tam*—by Him; *pravaṇa-ātmanā*—fully absorbing your mind.

The great sage Nārada told Dhruva Mahārāja: The instruction given by your mother, Sunīti, to follow the path of devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is just suitable for you. You should therefore completely absorb yourself in the devotional service of the Lord.

PURPORT: ⑫ Dhruva Mahārāja's demand was to achieve an abode even greater than Lord Brahmā's. Within this universe, Lord Brahmā is supposed to be in the most exalted position, for he is the chief of all demigods, but Dhruva Mahārāja wanted a realm beyond his. Therefore as described in *Bhagavad-gītā,* the benedictions offered by the demigods are all temporary. Therefore Nārada Muni asked Dhruva Mahārāja to follow the path recommended by his mother—to worship Kṛṣṇa, Vāsudeva. When Kṛṣṇa offers anything, it is beyond the expectation of the devotee. Both Sunīti and Nārada Muni knew that the demand of Dhruva Mahārāja was impossible for any demigod to fulfill, and therefore both of them recommended following the process of devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

⑬ Nārada Muni is referred to here as *bhagavān* because he can bless any person just as the Supreme Personality of Godhead can. ⑭ He was very pleased with Dhruva Mahārāja, and he could have at once personally given whatever he wanted, but that is not the duty of the spiritual master. His duty is to engage the disciple in proper devotional service as prescribed in the *śāstras.* Kṛṣṇa was similarly present before Arjuna, and even though He could have given him all facilities for victory over the opposing party without a fight, He did not do so; instead He asked Arjuna to fight. In the same way, Nārada Muni asked Dhruva Mahārāja to undergo devotional discipline in order to achieve the desired result.

41 धर्मार्थकाममोक्षाख्यं य इच्छेच्छ्रेय आत्मनः
एकं ह्येव हरेस्तत्र कारणं पादसेवनम्

dharmārtha-kāma-mokṣākhyaṁ
ya icchec chreya ātmanaḥ
ekaṁ hy eva hares tatra
kāraṇaṁ pāda-sevanam

[*Continued in the next issue.*]

Trying to Put A Date on the Vedas

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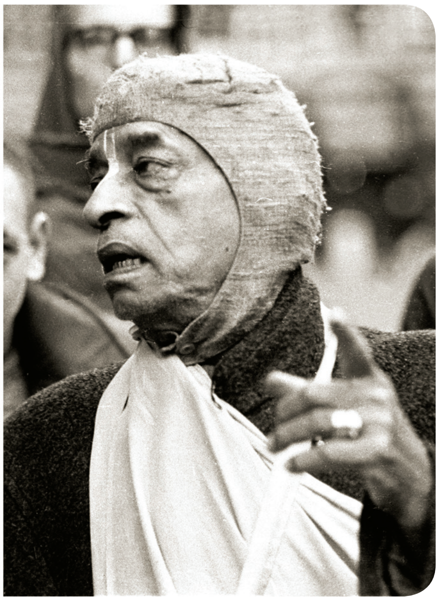

This exchange between His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and a British student took place during an early-morning walk in London in 1973.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: The message of Kṛṣṇa consciousness comes from the spiritual world. It is not of this material world. Therefore sometimes people may misunderstand it. So we have to explain it nicely. They cannot even understand what is the soul. Big, big scientists. Big, big philosophers. They have no information of the spirit and the spiritual world. Therefore, sometimes they find it very difficult to understand.

Guest: Lately I've been doing some research on the dating of the *Vedas.* Some archaeologists maintain that the evidence from the Harappa dig and Mohenjo-Daro show the dating of the *Vedas* in fact to be a great deal later than previously thought. This would seem to deprive the *Vedas* of a certain amount of authority, because they no longer would appear to be the most ancient religious scriptures in the world.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: *Veda* does not mean "religion." *Veda* means "knowledge." So if you can trace out the history of knowledge, then you can trace out the date for the origin of *Veda.* Can you trace out when knowledge began? Can you trace it out?

Guest: I wouldn't think we could.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: So how can you trace out the history of *Vedas*? *Vedas* means knowledge. So first of all find out from which date knowledge began. Then you find out the age of the *Vedas.*

The history of *Veda* began from the date of the creation of this material world. No one can give the date of the creation. The creation begins with the birth of Brahmā, and you cannot calculate even the length of Brahmā's one day. During Brahmā's night, the universe is devastated to some extent, and during his daytime, creation takes place again. There are two kinds of devastations. One devastation takes place during the night of Brahmā, and one final devastation annihilates the entire cosmic manifestation. But these tiny people are speculating about the dates of the *Vedas.* That is ludicrous.

There are many microbes that grow in the evening and die just as the day is beginning. One night is their whole span of life. So our life is like that. What history can you write? Therefore, we receive Vedic knowledge from Vedic authorities.

One should not be a frog philosopher.

Do you know about frog philosophy? Dr. Frog had never seen the Atlantic Ocean, and somebody

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informed him, "Oh, I have seen such a vast mass of water."

So Dr. Frog said, "Oh, is it bigger than this well?"

Guest: Yes, it was beyond his conception.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Yes. So these scholars are like frogs rotting in their wells. What can they possibly understand of the Vedic knowledge?

Guest: Yes, I see. To change the subject, I wonder whether you feel that the *Vedas* affirm that the most true form of life, the most pure form of life, is one that's lived alongside nature, not against nature as we seem to be doing in our urban setting.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Oh, yes. Real life means you have to minimize your bodily activities so that you can save time and devote yourself to spiritual understanding. That is real life. And the present civilization based on the bodily concept of life is animal life. It is not civilized life.

Athāto brahma-jijñāsā: civilized life begins when one is so much advanced that he inquires about the spirit soul. But when there is no such inquiry, when people cannot inquire what is spirit soul, they are like cats and dogs.

Vedic life teaches one to become as free as possible from bodily disturbances. Therefore, Vedic education begins with *brahmacarya,* celibacy. You see? But these rascals cannot check their sex life. Their philosophy is that you should go on with sex life unrestrictedly and, when there is pregnancy, kill the child.

Guest: Yes.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: That is their rascal philosophy. They have no idea that by training one can forget sex life. And if you forget sex life, where is the question of abortion? But they cannot do that. Therefore it is said, *adānta-gobhir viśataṁ tamisram:* by unrestricted sense enjoyment they are gradually going down to the level of animal life.

A person who indulges in abortion, killing the baby in the womb, will be put into a womb in his next life, and somebody will kill him. As many babies as he has killed, he'll have to accept that many lives and be killed. So for hundreds of years it will be impossible for him to see daylight. He'll remain in the womb and be killed. People don't know nature's laws. One cannot violate nature's laws as one can the state laws. Suppose you kill somebody—you can escape by trick. But you cannot escape nature's law. As many times as you have killed, that many times you must be killed within the womb. That is nature's law.

Guest: Only last week I was talking to a nurse who works on an abortion ward in one of the main London hospitals. It's terrible. Some of the fetuses are in such an advanced state of development that clearly life is a strong possibility.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: There is no question of possibility. Life begins from the very beginning of sex. The living entity is very small. By nature's law, according to his karma, he's sent into the father's semen and injected into the mother's womb. The sperm and egg cells from the man and woman emulsify and form a body that is just like a pea. Then that pealike form develops gradually. This is all described in the Vedic literature. The first stage is the manifestation of nine holes—for the ears, eyes, nostrils, mouth, genitals, and rectum. Then the senses gradually develop, and by six and a half months everything is complete, and the living entity's consciousness comes back. Prior to the formation of the body, the living entity remains unconscious, like in anesthesia. Then he dreams, and then gradually comes to consciousness. At that time he becomes very much reluctant to come out, but nature gives him a push, and he comes out. This is the process of birth.

This is Vedic knowledge. In the Vedic literature you'll find everything perfectly described. Therefore, how can the *Vedas* be subject to history? But the difficulty is that we are speaking of things that are spiritual. Therefore it is sometimes difficult for the gross materialists to understand. They are so dull-headed that they cannot understand.

From Rituals To Realizations

Raised in the Madhvācārya tradition of South India, a young woman seeks the essential truths behind her family's religious practices.

by Sri Vidya Balaji

Sri Vidya Balaji and her husband, Muthukumaran.

KṚṢṆA consciousness was not an alien concept to me, as I was born into an orthodox Madhva community in South India. I grew up in a household where rituals and personal worship were the way of life. Our deity of Lord Kṛṣṇa was treated as the most important member of the family. He was always the first to be served, from the first cup of milk in the morning to the last meal at night. No one was allowed to partake of any food without first offering it to the Lord.

In the early morning, we sang a song called *Suprabhātam* to wake the Lord. Later, mother cooked while chanting Kṛṣṇa's names. Then father would perform *pūjā,* or personal worship, offering the Lord flowers and prayers. *Naivedyam,* a food offering, would follow. In the evening my parents would light a lamp near the altar and sing hymns. Days ended with offering the Lord a glass of milk and singing Him to sleep.

As I watched this routine, I grew up to be a teenaged girl. Childishness exited. Modern materialistic education made me wonder and ask questions.

Initial Inquiry

Birth in a pious family is an advantage. But that on its own does not guarantee anything. Kṛṣṇa Himself confirms in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that only He gives people the understanding by which they can reach Him. Until He gives that understanding, the transformation never takes place.

And that's how it was with me. Until the Lord gave me the urge to find out what the Supreme is, I was adamant that religious activities were a waste of time and money. But the Lord inspired questions in my mind that would lead to an appreciation of my spiritual heritage.

Searching for an Answer

To find answers to my questions, I first went to my father, considered an authority on spiritual subjects.

My questions:

1. What is our true identity?
2. Why does our family perform all these rituals at home?
3. How do our rituals help society?

His answers came spontaneously:

1. In our household, we follow Madhvācārya, who teaches that we are *jīvātmās,* parts of God.

2. The rituals we perform at home are not meaningless, but are the very foundation of human life.

3. Performance of these rituals, along with our overall way of lie, does, on the whole, help society.

Rather than quieting my mind, these responses led to yet more questions.

"Why does Madhva say that Lord Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme?" I asked. "Where is the evidence that *jīvātmā* and Paramātmā are different? How can a life lived in accord with the scriptures help society?"

Youth, external influences, and materialistic education had confounded me to the core—my young mind didn't know what to hold on to, or let go of.

My father replied, "Truth should be sought after. So I encourage you to find answers to these questions. Read as many books as you can. Consult your own mind. Look inward, and let me know what you find."

That was the best treatment my rebellious mind could ask for.

From then on I read various texts but could not find satisfactory answers to my questions. Youth, external influences, and materialistic education had confounded me to the core. South India was undergoing a transformation. Political leaders were condemning spirituality and anything God related as "backward" and "obsolete." It was chaotic. My young mind didn't know what to hold on to, or what to let go of.

Introduction to Bhagavad-gītā and Śrīla Prabhupāda's Works

I read many books, but the reading only confused me further and left me with even more questions. I went to my father and again asked him for help. He asked me whether I had read the *Bhagavad-gītā.*

No, I answered.

He said it was good that I had not tried to read it on my own, because this scripture, although containing the answers to all my questions, had to be received in the proper way so that I could understand the true goal of human life. He said he was going to arrange for someone from ISKCON to teach me *Bhagavad-gītā.* There would be a small gathering in our house every Sunday evening. It would be fun and the perfect opportunity to find answers.

That was the best thing that ever happened in my life. That class opened my mind to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and introduced me to the great spiritual teacher Śrīla Prabhupāda and his works.

Answers

I imagined that the ISKCON teacher my father had invited would be an elderly person. Instead, a young woman arrived with a copy of Śrīla Prabhupāda's *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is.* She offered prayers to the Lord at the altar and began with a smile. She seemed focused, happy, and clear. Somehow, I felt sure that all my doubts were about to disappear.

Just as she began the class, I interrupted and asked her if I could ask a few questions. She was happy to help me. During the conversation that followed, my life was transformed forever, becoming a blissful experience, a journey filled with love.

Teacher: Do you believe in God?
Me: Yes.
Teacher: Do you believe that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead?
Me: I'm confused. I can't answer that question. I want to know who the ultimate God is.
Teacher: To know the Supreme, you have to refer to the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads.* These are the basic scriptures explaining clearly who the Lord is. *Bhagavad-gītā* is an *Upaniṣad* explaining truth. Śrīla Prabhupāda presented the *Bhagavad-gītā* "as it is," without concoctions and personal interpretations. I would recommend that you to use this book rather than any other *Bhagavad-gītā.* Now tell me what you know about the *Gītā.*
Me: It's a universal scripture, like the Bible and the Koran.
Teacher: That's right. Now, if in a holy scripture Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa were to declare Himself the cause of all causes, and to show the world that He is the Supreme, would you believe that?
Me: Yes.
Teacher: You are about to listen to God. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa speaks to everyone through the *Gītā.* The facilitator in this case is the great spiritual teacher Śrīla Prabhupāda. I encourage everyone here to read his books and books about him to get to know what ISKCON is all about.
Me: Before we begin, I would like to address a few more questions on my mind. Why is devotional service to the Lord important? What do we achieve by feeding Him and serving Him? Does it benefit society in any way?
Teacher: Kṛṣṇa does not need our service. This whole system of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is designed to develop the ultimate love of God that Lord Caitanya propagated. The first step in getting close to God is to develop love for Him. Do you serve your parents?
Me: Yes.

Teacher: Just as we serve our parents and loved ones, we try to make Kṛṣṇa our very own family member. This develops intense love for Him and enables us to get back to Him as soon as possible, escaping the cycle of birth and death.

You asked me if this benefits society. Let me explain. You grew up seeing your parents doing this from your childhood. Whether you believe in it or not, whenever you eat a fruit or a sweet, your hands automatically go to the altar to offer it, right?

Me: Yes.

Teacher: Your mother has raised a Kṛṣṇa conscious child. She created a spiritual environment for you. Even if you are offered chances to eat meat or drink liquor, you avoid them because these have been absent in your system right from childhood.

Me: That's true.

Teacher: Now imagine every household developing these practices, every citizen taking to these concepts and creating a wonderful society. Meat-eating, intoxication, gambling, and illicit sex cloud the consciousness, and then discrimination is lost. This is the exact reason behind all crimes and bad elements in our society. Now do you see how these practices benefit society?

Me: I understand. My parents told me that we follow Śrī Madhvācārya's teachings, which say that we—*jīvātmā* and the Lord, Paramātmā—are different. But I read other philosophies that led me to think that we become one with the Lord at the end. Could you explain this?

Teacher: I'm glad you brought this up. Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings are based on the Brahma-Mādhva-Gauḍīya lineage. His teachings are authenticated, not mere imagination or speculation. The answer to your question is "apply common sense." Can you create one thing the Lord has created? Can you make an amoeba in a lab?

Me: No.

Teacher: Then this proves that you are a limited and dependent entity. God, on the other hand, is the cause of all causes. He shows in the *Gītā* chapter about His universal form that He is in everything and everything is in Him. Hence you, I, and all other living beings on earth are dependent and separate from the Lord. Paramātmā is unique and distinguished by His unlimited potencies. Though we are limited, we can gain His grace through *bhakti-yoga* and go back to Him, never to return to the material world.

On the Path

I was wonder struck. A young woman could apply such logic and explain the greatest truths in a simple way. What made her so clear, so intelligent? I understood that it was Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions.

I ended my questions. As she turned the pages of the divine scripture and started the class, I lost a lot of things and gained a few. I lost anxiety, doubt, depression, and anger. The few things I gained were the pillars that would keep me going. I gained faith—unswerving faith in Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. I gained bliss, the natural state of every soul. And I gained perspective—correct ideas about life and after this life.

In the *Gītā* the Lord says that for the devotees, "I carry what they lack, and I preserve what they have." Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa brought me what I lacked: faith. And He preserved what I have: the spiritual yearning in me. I thank Śrī Kṛṣṇa for showing me Śrīla Prabhupāda; any other teacher would have confused me. I thank the Lord again and again for giving me the best teacher who could lead me to Him.

Now I'm reading many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. I'm developing that ultimate love that Lord Caitanya showed through His own life.

I'm still a student. But now I'm a bold student who can confidently say, "I'm on the right path."

What Is the Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement?

Founded in 1966 by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) carries on a great ancient tradition rooted in the *Bhagavad-gītā,* the teachings Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke five millennia ago. The *Gītā* and the other Vedic scriptures declare Kṛṣṇa to be the original person, God Himself, who appears periodically in this world to liberate all living beings.

Only five hundred years ago, Kṛṣṇa descended as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to teach the most sublime and effective means of meditation for the present day: the chanting of the names of God, especially as found in the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.

Today members of ISKCON continue Lord Caitanya's movement by distributing the teachings of Lord Kṛṣṇa and the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra all over the world.

Pronunciation

We spell Sanskrit words and names by a phonetic system that lets you know how to say each word. Pronounce short **a** like the **u** in b**u**t, long **ā** like the **a** in f**a**r (and held twice as long as the short **a**). Pronounce **e** like the **a** in ev**a**de, long **ī** like the **i** in p**i**que. Pronounce the vowel **ṛ** like the **ri** in **ri**m, and **c** like the **ch** in **ch**air. Pronounce consonants like **ch, jh,** and **dh** as in staun**ch-h**eart, hed**ge-h**og, and re**d-h**ot. Pronounce **ś** and **ṣ** like **sh.** So for *Kṛṣṇa* say KRISHNA, for *Caitanya* say CHAITANYA.

Spiritual Names

ISKCON members receive names of Lord Kṛṣṇa or his great devotees, combined with Dāsa, for men, or Dāsī, for women, both of which mean "servant." For instance, the name Kṛṣṇa Dāsa means "servant of Kṛṣṇa."

Yogini in white: ©Mitar Gavric | Dreamstime.com
Cymbal player and montage: Yamarāja Dāsa

Hatha Yoga and the Bhagavad-gītā

Though Patañjali is generally considered the authority on yoga, the Gītā *not only covers the eight steps of his method—it goes much deeper.*

by Satyarāja Dāsa

ACCORDING TO A 2003 survey by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, an estimated 13.4 million Americans practice yoga, and many more experiment with it every year. Yoga is everywhere—from Mumbai to Moscow to Monte Carlo. But while yoga is meant to bring one closer to God, many of today's yogis have a different agenda, the most common being to keep their bodies in shape.

"They're not necessarily deeply spiritual, but looking more to do yoga as another form of exercise," says Jennifer McKinley, co-founder and general manager of Plank, a Charlestown, Massachusetts, maker of chic, high-end yoga mats, totes, and other accessories. Launched in 2005, the company projects sales in the upcoming year that will rival that of Western exercise equipment.

In an increasingly secular world, we naturally want to adapt valuable ancient techniques for contemporary purposes, but yoga is losing its essence in the process.

Yoga is a science left to us by the sages of India. The word *yoga* literally means "to link up," and its implication, originally, was similar to the Latin root of the word *religion,* which means "to bind back." Thus, yoga and religion are both meant to bring us to the same end: linking up and binding with God.

The Inner Message of the Yoga-sūtras

Today's yogis might find it interesting that traditionally the preeminent text on yoga is the *Bhagavad-gītā*—not Patañjali's famous *Yoga-sūtras.* But the *Gītā* is not your usual yoga text, full of difficult bodily poses and strenuous meditation techniques. Rather, it offers a practical outline for achieving the goal of yoga—linking with God—by encouraging the chanting of Kṛṣṇa's names, by teaching how to act under Kṛṣṇa's order, and by explaining the importance of doing one's duty in spiritual consciousness. These activities, properly performed under the guidance of an adept, allow one to bypass much of what is considered essential in conventional yoga.

And yet there is harmony between the *Gītā* and the *Yoga-sūtras.* For example, both Lord Kṛṣṇa and Patañjali indicate that we must transcend all false conceptions of “I” and develop love for God, which Patañjali calls *īśvara-praṇidhāna* (“dedication to God”).

Patañjali wrote in the third century CE, but little is known about his life. His only surviving text, the *Yoga-sūtra,* would indicate that toned physical and mental tabernacles are helpful in the pursuit of spiritual truth. In fact, his major accomplishment is that he took age-old practices meant for improving the body and the mind and codified them for the benefit of spiritual practitioners.

But Patañjali’s *Yoga-sūtras* merely hint at the truths illuminated in the *Bhagavad-gītā,* which might be considered the post-graduate study of Patañjali’s work. Even so, Patañjali intended his method to be used for ultimate spiritual benefit, as some of his verses, especially later ones, clarify. Still, many yoga practitioners today use his method solely for physical and mental health because in the beginning of his work Patañjali mainly focuses on basic methods related to the body and the mind, without much spiritual commentary.

In *sūtra* 3.2, for example, we learn that *dhyāna,* or meditation, is the one-pointed continuous movement of the mind toward a single object. But Patañjali’s technique can be used for concentration on any object, not just on God. And even though he tells his readers the point of his *sūtras*—to get closer to God—one may be tempted to use his methods for selfish ends, as he says later in the text. Ultimately, one-pointed concentration is for focusing on God, though it’s not until one graduates to the *Bhagavad-gītā* that one clearly learns how to do this.

As Professor Edwin Bryant points out in his excellent article “Patanjali’s Theistic Preference, Or, Was the Author of the Yoga-sutras a Vaishnava?”[1] Patañjali was trying to gear his diverse audience toward the worship of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, even if he was doing so in a roundabout way. Much like today, many forms of religion beleaguered the India of his time; practitioners worshiped numerous aspects of the Supreme. Consequently, he opted for a stepwise approach in his *Yoga-sūtras* that he believed would accommodate his varied audience.

Still, he asserts that the ultimate object of meditation is Īśvara, which means “controller” and generally refers to God. Although there are many controllers and many forms of the Godhead, *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.61) says that the ultimate *īśvara* is Kṛṣṇa. Other texts tell us this as well. Consider the ancient *Brahma-saṁhitā* (5.1):

> *īśvaraḥ-paramaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ*
> *sac-cid-ānanda vigrahaḥ*
> *anādir ādir govindaḥ*
> *sarva-kāraṇa-kāraṇam*

“Kṛṣṇa, who is known as Govinda, is the Supreme Godhead [*īśvaraḥ-paramaḥ*]. He has an eternal blissful spiritual body. He is the origin of all. He has no other origin, and He is the prime cause of all causes.”

Four Yogas

KṚṢNA SUMMARIZES various forms of yoga in the *Gītā’s* eighteen chapters. In essence there are four kinds: *Rāja-yoga* involves sitting postures, breath control, and meditation and is popular today in the form of hatha yoga. *Bhakti-yoga* is the yoga of devotion, *karma-yoga* the yoga of selfless action, and *jñāna-yoga* the yoga of knowledge.

While the paths differ, their fundamental goal is the same: to realize that God is the core of our being and that life is meant for dedicating ourselves to His service. Yoga in all its varieties seeks to bring its practitioners beyond the usual identification with the body and the mind, situating one in transcendence. Thus, Patañjali codified a means by which one could master one’s senses, ultimately leading to the goal of yoga. His method is a type of *rāja-yoga.* But the other yoga systems are more direct, fostering relationship and even intimacy with God. And of all the yogas, *bhakti* is the best, because it puts its practitioners in an immediate relationship with God in His topmost personal form, as Kṛṣṇa, thus achieving the goal of yoga in an easy and natural way.

Patañjali advises his audience to choose an *iṣṭa-devatā,* a deity of their choice. His reasoning is transparent: He is trying to teach a method of meditation, and learning this method is easiest if one practices on a subject close to one’s heart.

Did Patañjali have Kṛṣṇa in mind when he outlined the yoga process and its goal of love of God? For one learned in the Vedic literature, it is obvious that the answer is yes. In the words of Edwin Bryant:

> Krishna is . . . promoted by the Gita as possessing all the . . . qualities listed by Patanjali as pertaining to *isvara,* namely, being transcendental to karma, of unsurpassed omniscience, teacher of the ancients, untouched by Time, represented by *om,* and awarding enlightenment. Krishna is not touched or bound by karma (Gita, IV.14, IX.9), and, in terms of omniscience, he is the beginning, middle and end of all (X.20 & 32), who pervades the entire universe with but a single fragment of himself (X.42). Krishna taught the ancients (here specified as Vivasvan, the sun god, who in turn imparted knowledge to Manu, the progenitor of mankind [IV.1]) and is himself Time (X.30 & 33; XI.32). He is also the syllable *om* (IX.17). And, of course, Krishna assures his devotees that he will free them from the snares of this world such that they attain the supreme goal (IX.30-32; X.10;

> VIII. 58). There is thus perfect compatibility between Patanjali's unnamed *isvara* and Krishna as depicted in the Gita.[2]

The commentarial tradition of the *Yoga-sūtras* bears this out. Patañjali's major commentators were Vyasa (fifth century CE, not to be confused with the compiler of the Vedic literature), Vachaspati Misra (ninth century CE), Bhoja Raja (eleventh century CE), and Vijnanabhiksu (sixteenth century CE). All identify the *īśvara* of the *Yoga-sūtras* with Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa and show how the *Bhagavad-gītā* expresses the culmination of all Vedic wisdom relating to yoga.

The Gītā's Eight Limbs

The *Bhagavad-gītā* addresses all eight limbs of *rāja-yoga,* the form of yoga popular today as *aṣṭāṅga* yoga or hatha yoga.[3] For example, *yama,* the first limb, consists of five ethical principles: truthfulness, continence, nonviolence, noncovetousness, and abstention from stealing. These fundamental disciplines of yoga are mentioned in the *Gītā,* as is *niyama,* the second limb, which consists of things like worship, cleanliness, contentment, austerity, and self-reflection.

Now, the third limb of Patañjali's method, *āsana,* is less obvious in the *Gītā.* The term *āsana* appears infrequently on Lord Kṛṣṇa's lips. But when it does, it refers to "the place where one sits for spiritual practice." The *Gītā* does not give tips on sitting postures. Its Sixth Chapter, though, comes close. Verses 11 and 12 state: "To practice yoga, one should go to a secluded place and should lay *kuśa* grass on the ground and then cover it with a deerskin and a soft cloth. The seat [*āsana*] should be neither too high nor too low and should be situated in a sacred place. The yogi should then sit on it very firmly and practice yoga to purify the heart by controlling his mind, senses, and activities and fixing the mind on one point."

Here Kṛṣṇa uses the word *āsana* in a general rather than technical sense. He is talking about sitting to focus the mind.

It's easy to lose focus, and that's basically Arjuna's argument against hatha yoga. In fact, Patañjali himself identifies nine obstacles on the path: doubt, disease, lethargy, mental laziness, false perception, lack of enthusiasm, clinging to sense enjoyment, lack of concentration, and losing concentration. His commentators list several others as well, including inordinate attraction to yogic powers, a misconceived view of meditation, oversimplification of yoga's eight limbs, and irregularity of practice. All of these problems are traceable to the difficult nature of Patañjali's method and are why Arjuna views hatha yoga as virtually impossible. By the end of the Sixth Chapter he denounces it as too difficult. Kṛṣṇa agrees, telling Arjuna that the ultimate yogi always thinks of God. He further tells him that such meditation is real yoga, implying that using one's body and mind in Kṛṣṇa's service is the perfect *āsana.*

The *Gītā* also discusses *prāṇāyāma,* or breath control, the fourth limb. Kṛṣṇa says that yogis can use the incoming and outgoing breath as offerings to Him. He speaks about dedicating one's life breath to God. He tells Arjuna that His devotees' *prāṇa,* or air of life, is meant for God and that Arjuna should use it "to come to Me." In fact, if one follows Arjuna's example and offers every breath to Kṛṣṇa—by speaking about Him, chanting His glories, and living for Him—there is little need for breath control as delineated in Patañjali's *sūtras.* Breathing for God is the essence of *prāṇāyāma.* Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Chanting of the holy name of the Lord and dancing in ecstasy are also considered *prāṇāyāma.*" (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.23.8, Purport)

Prabhupāda writes, "Chanting of the holy name of the Lord and dancing in ecstasy are also considered prāṇāyāma.*"*

The fifth limb of yoga, *pratyāhāra,* deals with the withdrawal of the senses, a major subject in the *Bhagavad-gītā.* In the Second Chapter Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that the yogi withdraws his senses from sense objects, "as the tortoise draws its limbs within the shell." Taken superficially, this might seem to suggest full renunciation of the world. But that's not what Kṛṣṇa is getting at. Rather, as other verses make clear, He's teaching how to renounce the fruits of work, not work itself, and how to be in the world but not of it. In other words, His teaching centers on how to withdraw one's attachment to sense objects for personal enjoyment. He instructs us to use these same objects in the service of God. That is true *pratyāhāra.*

The Upper Limbs

And then we have the culmination of yoga practice—the last three limbs of *rāja-yoga: dhāraṇā, dhyāna,* and *samādhi,* or concentration, meditation, and complete absorption.

While *yama* and *niyama* are preliminary steps, these three are called *saṁyama*, "the perfect discipline" or "perfect practice." *Bhagavad-gītā* speaks extensively of these upper limbs. For example, Lord Kṛṣṇa states, "Just fix your mind upon Me, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and engage all your intelligence in Me. Thus you will live in Me always, without a doubt. My dear Arjuna, O winner of wealth, if you cannot fix your mind upon Me without deviation, then follow the regulative principles of *bhakti-yoga* [*abhyāsa-yogena*]. In this way develop a desire to attain Me." (Bg. 12.8–9)

The process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is practical *dhāraṇā,* or spiritual concentration. By seeing paintings of Kṛṣṇa, we use our sense of sight for God; by chanting and hearing we engage the tongue and the ear; by offering incense to Kṛṣṇa we engage our sense of smell. All the senses can help us engage in *dhāraṇā,* leading to advanced states of meditation and absorption.

The holy name is particularly effective in this regard. That's why Kṛṣṇa says that of austerities He is the austerity of *japa,* private chanting, especially while counting on beads. Chanting is the king of austerities because by chanting we can easily reach the goal of yoga. It all comes together in the practice of *japa* because by chanting God's names we focus on Him with our voice, ears, and sense of touch. And *kīrtana,* congregational chanting, not only takes us to deep levels of absorption but engages the senses of onlookers as well. In *sūtra* 1.28, Patañjali, too, promotes "constant chanting."

Overall, Patañjali's ambivalence might appear confusing. When he first mentions *īśvara-praṇidhāna,* dedication to God, he presents it as optional, while later he gives it far more attention, with six verses elaborating on the nature of *īśvara.* In the beginning he seems to allow variance in the object of meditation (1.34-38), but ultimately he advises the yogi to focus on *īśvara,* who in Patañjali's words is the "special supreme soul" who alone can bestow *samādhi,* yogic perfection.

Patañjali says in *sūtra* 3.3 that *samādhi* occurs when the object of your meditation appears in your heart of hearts without any competitors or distractions. You have no other interest, as if your intrinsic nature loses meaning.

The *Bhagavad-gītā* makes it clearer. In *samādhi* your intrinsic nature doesn't lose meaning. Rather, it takes on new meaning: You see yourself in relation to Kṛṣṇa. You are now His devotee; He's the focus of your life. That state of perfect and total absorption is called Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Igor Novoborsky

Brno, Czech Republic

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare
Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma
Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare

PRONUNCIATION:
ha-ray, krish-na, ra-ma (rhymes with "drama")

NOTES

1. Edwin F. Bryant, "*Patanjali's Theistic Preference, Or, Was the Author of the Yoga-sutras a Vaishnava,*" in *The Journal of Vaishnava Studies,* Volume 14, Number 1 (Fall 2005).
2. Ibid.
3. This has been pointed out by my friend Graham Schweig, professor of religion at Christopher Newport University, Virginia. Much of the material in this article on the eight limbs of yoga comes from his interviews and lectures.

Satyarāja Dāsa, a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, is a BTG associate editor. He has written over twenty books on Kṛṣṇa consciousness and lives near New York City.

CALENDAR

This calendar is calculated for Māyāpur, West Bengal, India. The dates, derived from a lunar calendar, may vary by one day for other locations. For the exact dates for your area, go to ***www.krishna.com/calendar****.*

Because the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement comes in disciplic line from Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the calendar includes not only dates relevant to all followers of the Vedic tradition but also dates relating to Lord Caitanya's associates and prominent spiritual masters in His disciplic succession.

August 17–September 15

(*Month of Hṛṣīkeśa*)

September

4—Appearance anniversary of Śrīmatī Sītā Devī, the consort of Śrīla Advaita Ācārya.

8—Śrī Rādhāṣṭamī, appearance anniversary of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, Lord Kṛṣṇa's eternal consort. Fasting till noon, followed by feasting.

11—Parśvā Ekādaśī
Fasting from grains and beans. (Fasting till noon today for Śrī Vāmana-dvādaśī tomorrow.)

12—Śrī Vāmana-dvādaśī, appearance anniversary of Lord Vāmana, Lord Kṛṣṇa's incarnation as a dwarf *brāhmaṇa*. Appearance anniversary of Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, one of the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

13—Appearance anniversary of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, father of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura (Śrīla Prabhupāda's spiritual master), and a pioneer in spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness in English. Fasting till noon, then feasting.

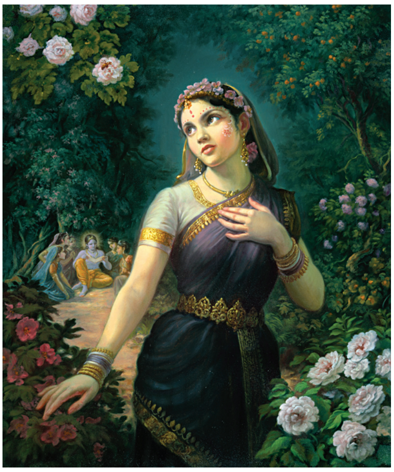
14—Disappearance anniversary of Haridāsa Ṭhākura, foremost teacher of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa.

15—Anniversary of Śrīla Prabhupāda's accepting *sannyāsa,* the renounced order of life. Third month of Cāturmāsya begins (fasting from milk).

September 16–October 14

(*Month of Padmanābha*)

21—Anniversary of Śrīla Prabhupāda's arrival in the United States.


Painting by Muralidhara Dāsa

Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī (See Sept. 8)

25—Indirā Ekādaśī
Fasting from grains and beans.

October

10—Rāmacandra Vijayotsava, the anniversary of Lord Rāma's victory over Rāvaṇa. Appearance anniversary of Śrīla Madhvācārya, a Vaiṣṇava philosopher and spiritual master who appeared in the thirteenth century.

11—Pāśāṅkuśā Ekādaśī
Fasting from grains and beans.

12—Disappearance anniversary of Śrīla Raghunātha Dāsa, Śrīla Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa, and Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmīs, great associates and followers of Lord Caitanya.

14—Śrī Kṛṣṇa Śāradīyā Rāsa-yātrā. Disappearance anniversary of Śrī Murāri Gupta, an associate of Lord Caitanya. Beginning of Dāmodara-vrata. Offering lamps for one month. Also, the fourth month of Cāturmāsya begins (fasting from *ūrad dāl*).

October 15–November 13

(*Month of Dāmodara*)

19—Disappearance anniversary of Śrīla Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura, a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa known for his Bengali devotional songs.

22—Appearance of Radha Kunda.

24—Ramā Ekādaśī
Fasting from grains and beans.

28—Diwali, the festival of illuminating Kṛṣṇa's temples with lamps. Call your local Hare Kṛṣṇa temple for details.

30—Govardhana Pūjā, the festival commemorating the worship of Govardhana Hill by the residents of Vṛndāvana and Kṛṣṇa's lifting the hill. Call your local Hare Kṛṣṇa temple for details.

November

2—Disappearance anniversary of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, founder-*ācārya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Devotees observe this day with personal remembrances of Śrīla Prabhupāda, readings from his biography, and fasting till noon, followed by feasting.

The Road Ahe

A Dubai commuter, stuck in traffic, muses on how modern inventions have failed to improve the quality of our lives and have added to our distress.

by Indra Kṛṣṇa Dāsa

UNITED HOLDINGS

Sheikh Zayed Road, Dubai

ad

Prem Bhatia

IT'S 7:00 P.M., and I've been driving for more than an hour. As I head home from work along Sheikh Zayed Road in Dubai, I'm caught in the usual evening traffic jam. Like the car ahead of me, my car starts, stops, and starts again. While my car moves slowly, my mind races. I do mental mathematics with the number on the car plate in front of me. The traffic keeps building up all around me, and I feel miserable, hopeless, and sick.

Despite the crowd outside, a strange loneliness engulfs me. In these hours of solitude, when my thoughts are my only companion, I become a philosopher; I turn my life upside down and reflect.

All around me is a sea of cars, the latest models of Pajeroes, Mercedes, BMWs, Land Cruisers, sports cars, and others competing with one another to get a few feet ahead. But what's the use of the latest and jazziest cars when they're forced to move so slowly that even a bullock cart puts them to shame? Material nature seems to conspire to nullify man's inventions. And why should she not? Modern developments have distressed nature, with pollution, perversion, and calamity everywhere.

I feel suffocated. I want to run out of my car to freedom. But I am hopelessly bound; I am not free.

And I know I'm not the only one who feels like this. Hundreds of thousands like me in this city and hundreds of millions around the world stoically go through this ordeal every day.

The Traffic Jams Of Everyday Life

We take traffic jams to be part of life, of civilized living, the subject of long discussions in our living rooms. We're frustrated. We see the need for unified action to improve the situation, but who will do it?

I'm moved by a desire to express our collective resentment. Thoughts that don't find words flood my mind. My anger and frustration garble all expression.

I'm in a situation my physics teacher in college would refer to as "diarrhea of thought and constipation of expression." I remember him teaching physics like an artist. In his teaching, the arts and science mixed into one coherent whole. I would remain transfixed in the class, mesmerized by the way he would handle complex topics such as wave dynamics, thermodynamics, and quantum mechanics like an opera maestro waving a wand to the musical crescendo.

I rarely experienced anything like that till I read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. In his books Prabhupāda has dealt in a unique yet simple way with diverse topics like science, metaphysics, philosophy, the arts, spirituality, music, language, and literature—taking us beyond this world into a transcendental realm where all boundaries vanish. The reader is moved, fascinated, and convinced.

Our Desires Cause Our Bondage

I'm transported to my days in college when it was my ardent desire to study in the US and drive on American highways. I did eventually drive on American highways, but without the thrill I'd expected.

When fulfilled, our material desires fail to satisfy us. The objects of our desires pale in comparison to the mental picture we have of them.

In fact, my experience in life has taught me that no material objects please us, even though our mind fantasizes on the pleasures of obtaining them. Once got, the real thing does not excite us anymore. It falls into our routine.

I now realize the futility of my wish to drive on good roads. Dubai's roads are as good as America's, but driving on them is now the cause of my pain. My desires have me suffering like a caged bird inside the car. I could have been free, but now I have to suffer to enjoy the fulfillment of my earlier wishes.

The Lord, being merciful, grants our wishes, one after another. And because we are dissatisfied, we keep asking for more. We think we will ultimately be gratified, but we are not. Sometimes we spend many lifetimes fulfilling one desire after another, forgetting the real meaning of life. The Lord is generous, providing us with different bodies, cars, and other toys to play with. When will we realize the ultimate futility of material progress and care for our spiritual enlightenment?

The bright neon lights that gorgeously illuminate the city cannot dispel the darkness within our hearts and souls.

From Boon to Cause of Trouble

One of man's greatest inventions, the car, is also one of his greatest banes. We started out excited to be able to travel great distances quickly, but that's no longer a thrill, but a routine drudgery. Like other inventions, we thought the car would remove toil from our lives, but it has only aggravated our condition.

True, we don't have to walk miles like our forefathers, but the car has brought with it a new set of problems. Our ability to travel fast and far has made it necessary for us to travel fast and far for things as mundane or routine as working, shopping, eating, and socializing. Our neighbors are strangers. We dislike what's locally available and travel great distances for alternatives. We may fool ourselves into believing this is progress, but in the ultimate analysis it is sheer stupidity. The advantage of the car has been lost because we do not know how to use this great boon judiciously. And our attraction to the car leads to global warming, wide-scale wars, and conflicts that threaten our existence.

I look at the buildings around me. Tall, imposing structures, with bright neon lights give a sparkling color to Dubai, a marvel of the modern mind. This is the place where the world comes to shop and tour. All the open spaces are gone, replaced by state-of-the-art buildings. A desert has been transformed into one of the most modern cities, complete with all the latest amenities and services—and their attendant virtues and vices.

I see the beautiful and majestic buildings competing with one another, but do they bring about a feeling of greatness in my mind or anyone else's? While the builders and the promoters boast of constructing such marvels on earth, my heart goes out to the hapless workers who toil hard daily for little money, inadequately compensated for the inconveniences and risks they take.

I see these workers, most of them from other countries, herded onto buses that transport them from and to their pitiable living quarters. They look curiously and sorrowfully out of the bus windows. They have many pressing issues on their mind. They are busy fending for themselves and worrying about their near and dear ones in their own country, trying to save something so their kith and kin can live a little better.

The Light of the Scriptures

I think of Lord Kṛṣṇa's answer to Brahmā prayers:

ṛte 'rthaṁ yat pratīyeta
na pratīyeta cātmani
tad vidyād ātmano māyāṁ
yathābhāso yathā tamaḥ

"O Brahmā, whatever appears to be of any value, if it is without relation to Me, has no reality. Know it as My illusory energy, that reflection which appears to be in darkness." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.9.34)

What is the relationship of all these things to the Lord, I wonder? Do these people at all believe in His omnipotence?

Everything I see is the illusory energy of the Lord. So many building have gone up and come down. So many innocents have toiled hard to satisfy the ego of the rich and the powerful. Did they receive a fair payment for the objects they created?

And how many people in their cars would think they achieved what they set out for? I look around. The man in the car next to mine seems frustrated and probably does not know why.

To seek an answer one has to study the Vedic scriptures, existing from the beginning of creation. In the above verse Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Brahmā, the creator of the universe, that anything we create is merely an illusion if it does not relate to the Lord. And how can we be satisfied by illusions? But this is modern development, a royal road to hell in the name of so-called progress that has no relation to the Lord. And every step takes us farther and farther away from Him. The bright neon lights that gorgeously illuminate the city cannot dispel the darkness within our hearts and souls.

I'm still looking at the wondrous edifices lined up one after another. The great marvels of science seem to me just a waste of time and resources.

Another fundamental question arises in my mind: Why do I—and everyone else—work hard to create illusory things? My modern mind balks, unwilling to acknowledge my plight. But I depend upon the light of the scriptures to dispel the darkness within. The Lord seated within our heart guides us. I realize that what I need is basic food, clothing, and shelter, a little love and care, freedom of the soul—can all these modern things give me that? The Lord provides for all these; the huge buildings, the billboards, the neon lights, and the cars do not provide me with my necessities. Modern industries produce unnecessary things better done without. But we keep adding them to our lives. In our quest for progress, we forget our real needs and run after illusions. I think of the futility of our endeavors. Is this the progress we strive for?

My mobile phone rings, a call from home. My wife and children would like to know how I'm doing. I tell them I'm fine and will be home after some time.

Help in the Holy Name

As my car inches forward slowly, remembrance of the Lord makes me feel better. I play the stereo, and a sweet *bhajana* fills the car and soothes my nerves. I start chanting the *mahā-mantra,* and a wonderful transformation takes place within me. The traffic now seems to bother me less; the neon lights and the tall, imposing buildings mean nothing to me. I keep driving.

The metro construction near the Trade Center building is causing more traffic jams. We've been told the new metro will end our traffic woes. We hope so, but the material world is full of miseries, where there are dangers at every step.

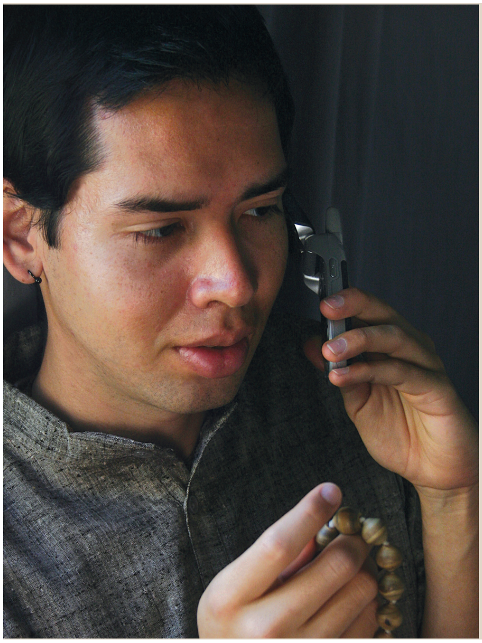
Prabhupāda talked of the spiritual sky, the Vaikuṇṭha planets, the transcendental world—our real abode, without suffering or distress. But all that is beyond us unless we are willing to follow the spiritual path for which he laid out clear and easy-to-follow principles and guidelines.

The clock shows 7:45 P. M., a good two hours from the time I started. I turn the corner near my house. The hookah shop on the corner is set up enticingly for the evening, and a lot of people seem to be enjoying themselves. I cannot help getting the same feeling I always get whenever I pass by the shop. How much time and effort these people spend preparing themselves for the royal road to hell! Everybody who smokes knows what harm smoking does to them. And yet people are attracted to it, like moths to fire. To come to real knowledge, they need the mercy of a spiritual master. Now their desire for sense gratification gets the better of their intelligence.

I think about someday shouting out to these people, but I lack the courage.

I park my car, and as I walk I feel happy at the prospect of sitting in front of my Gaura-Nitāi deities and praying to Them. I thank my spiritual master for having given me the most wonderful gift: the holy name. I can immerse myself in Kṛṣṇa's names and forget the pains of the day. And I can look forward to tomorrow—and more opportunities to remember the Lord. ✿

Indra Kṛṣṇa Dāsa, a disciple of His Holiness Jayapatāka Swami Mahārāja, lives in Dubai with his wife and their two sons. He has a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from IIT Kharagpur (India) and a master's degree in structural engineering from IIT Delhi. He works as a specialist structural engineer for a company that builds offshore platforms. He can be reached at ibanerjeel1231@yahoo.co.in.



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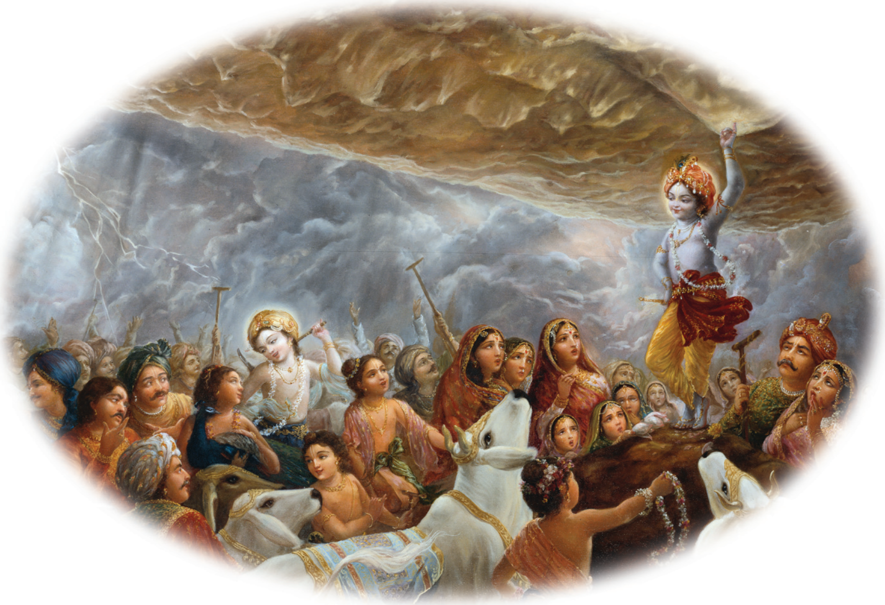
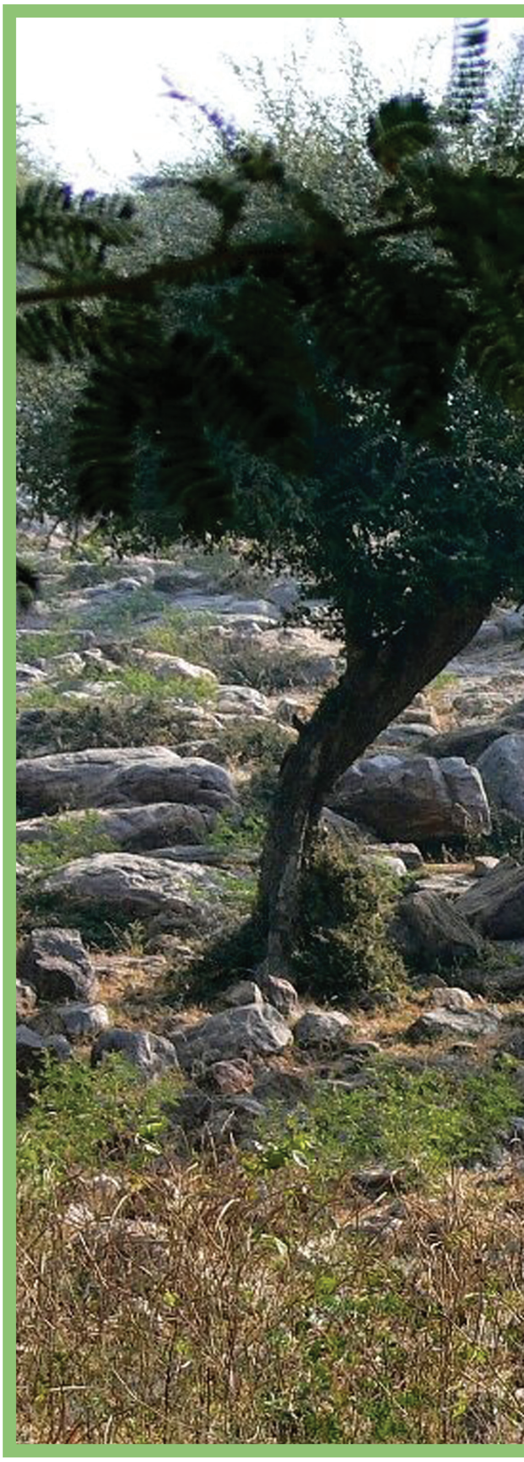
Govardhana

A sampling of the thousands of pilgrims who honor sacred Govardhana Hill during the special month known as Kārttika.

by Vaiśeṣika Dāsa



Painting by Dhṛtī Devī Dāsī



THERE'S NOT a more charming or mysterious place in the universe than Govardhana Hill in Vraja Maṇḍala, some ninety miles south of Delhi. While present on earth Kṛṣṇa lifted Govardhana Hill and held it for seven days to protect the residents of Vṛndāvana. He also revealed that Govardhana is identical to Himself. Now, fifty centuries later, millions of pilgrims come here to perform *parikramā*—a reverential walk around the hill—during the holy month of Kārttika (October/November).

Only by the mercy of the Vaiṣṇavas have I been allowed to stay here for a while in this magical place during this magical month. I've taken shelter of the Bhaktivedanta Ashrama, nestled at the base of Govardhana Hill and presided over by His Holiness Keśava Bhārati Dāsa Goswami. For my own purification, I've been making some notes. Here are today's:

The precious powder clinging to the feet of the pilgrims who walk around Govardhana Hill is *cintāmaṇi* [spiritual] dust. One particle of this dust is more valuable than all the wealth in the material world.

See the varieties of pilgrims who come to walk around Govardhana.

Meditations

Bhūrijana Dāsa

Staunch and silent, a swift sadhu wrapped in saffron cloth flies by, his gaze fixed forward. Because he makes this journey daily, he knows every pebble, tree, and cow, having passed them hundreds of times before.

Three women, two young and one venerable, have banded together and sing songs to Girirāja (Govardhana) as they go. They seem to float around the hill, carried by the divine sound of their own voices.

A householder with dark brown skin and slick, jet-black hair, and wearing brown pants and a smudged white shirt, walks proudly along the path, his wife and kids in tow. The kids march, taking two steps to every one of their father's, looking noble as they keep up the pace. Their sari-clad mother dutifully carries a bag brimming with a water bottle and biscuits and probably some other refreshments.

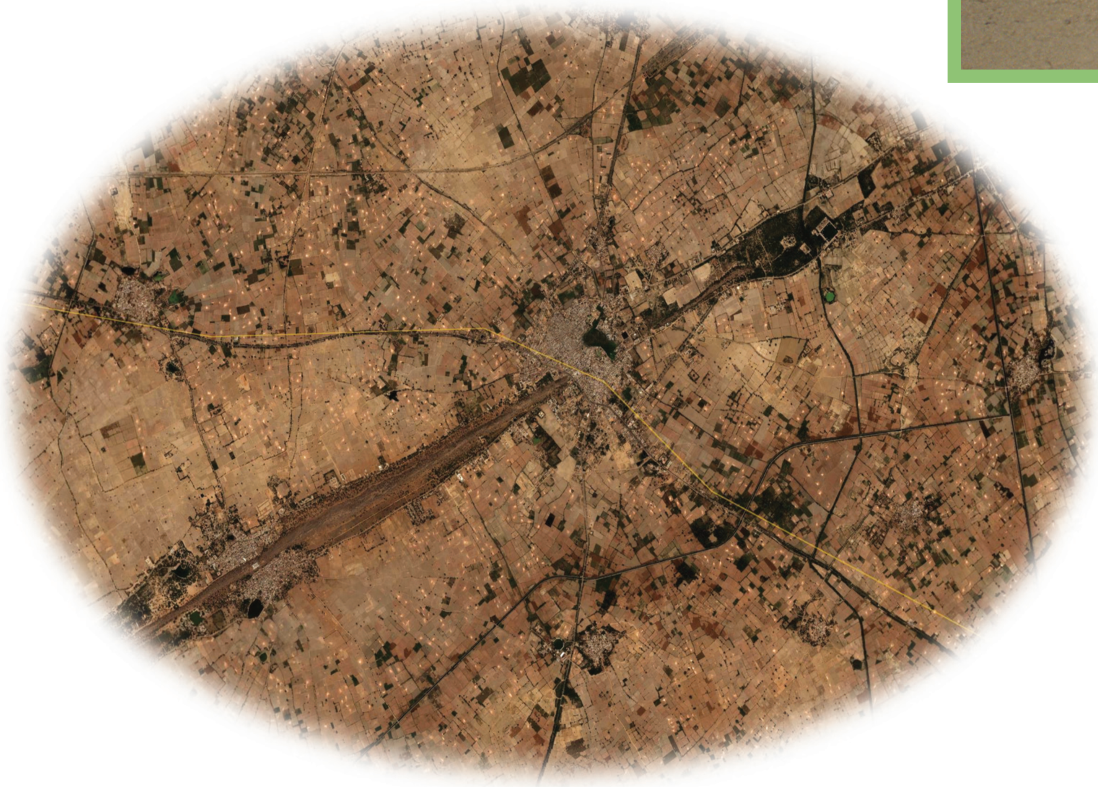
A sadhu on the path, bare-chested and wearing only a calf-length orange cloth, kneels next to a pile of smooth stones and then suddenly lunges forward, his lean back muscles rippling as he places one stone at a time on a pile of stones that lies before a simple shrine of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. An incense stick stuck in the ground below the shrine billows fragrant smoke. He will throw 108 stones, one at a time, and then lie face down in the dust with each toss. After advancing his pile of 108 stones, he'll move his entire operation forward one body length, only to start the ritual again. Nine months from now, he will complete his *parikramā* of Girirāja and will probably begin again.

A Different Kind of Circuit

To a man rushing to work on a freeway far away from this place, these pilgrims might seem mad. (After all, they are going in circles around a hill.) But the freeway driver runs his circuit too.

Every soul in the universe wants wealth and happiness and has been wearily searching for it around every corner. But "Alas!" says Prahlāda Mahārāja, "People are searching in vain, running after a mirage." Every promise for happiness has been broken.

But at Govardhana, all these pilgrims have the same gleam in their eyes. They are connected to a spir-



ISKCON devotees perform the traditional walk around Govardhana Hill (above). At left, a satellite photo shows oblong Govardhana Hill and the town of Govardhana.

Yamarāja Dāsa

itual current that runs through the path—they feel solace in it.

As a cook laboring to grind fresh spices soon relishes their scent and flavor, the pilgrims here feel Govardhana's sweetness entering their souls with each step. It shoots up through the soles of their feet and into their hearts as they walk barefoot along the path. They become greedy for more of this ambrosia, and so they walk in circles around the hill.

These souls are fortunate, for they have discovered the secret of life: The happiness we have been so feverishly searching for—all over the universe—is hidden, like a treasure, within our own hearts.

The route to finding this treasure is the *rāja-vidyā,* the king of all sciences. But the amazing fact is that this science is an open secret.

Let those who have ears hear:

Lord Kṛṣṇa reveals in *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.30) that by performing *yajña,* sacrifice to the Lord, we will taste eternal happiness and go back to Godhead.

"All these performers who know the meaning of sacrifice become cleansed of sinful reactions, and, having tasted the nectar of the results of sacrifices, they advance toward the supreme eternal atmosphere."

Sacrifice Is Life

In Kali-yuga, Lord Caitanya has brought the dharma of the age, *saṅkīrtana-yajña. Yajña* is the wellspring of happiness. Drink there by performing *saṅkīrtana* on the order of Lord Caitanya, following the footprints of the six Gosvāmīs. Please Śrīla Prabhupāda by distributing his books throughout this short lifetime. Focus on this endeavor and try to increase it all over the world as Prabhupāda did, and then even the Supreme abode of the Lord, Vṛndāvana, the ultimate abode of all happiness, will open to us by the mercy of the Lord.

Saṅkīrtana-yajña is life.

Govardhana-parikramā kī jaya!

Vaiśeṣika Dāsa has been distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda's books since the early 1970s. He teaches the art of book distribution to ISKCON members around the world.

SILENT SOUNDS

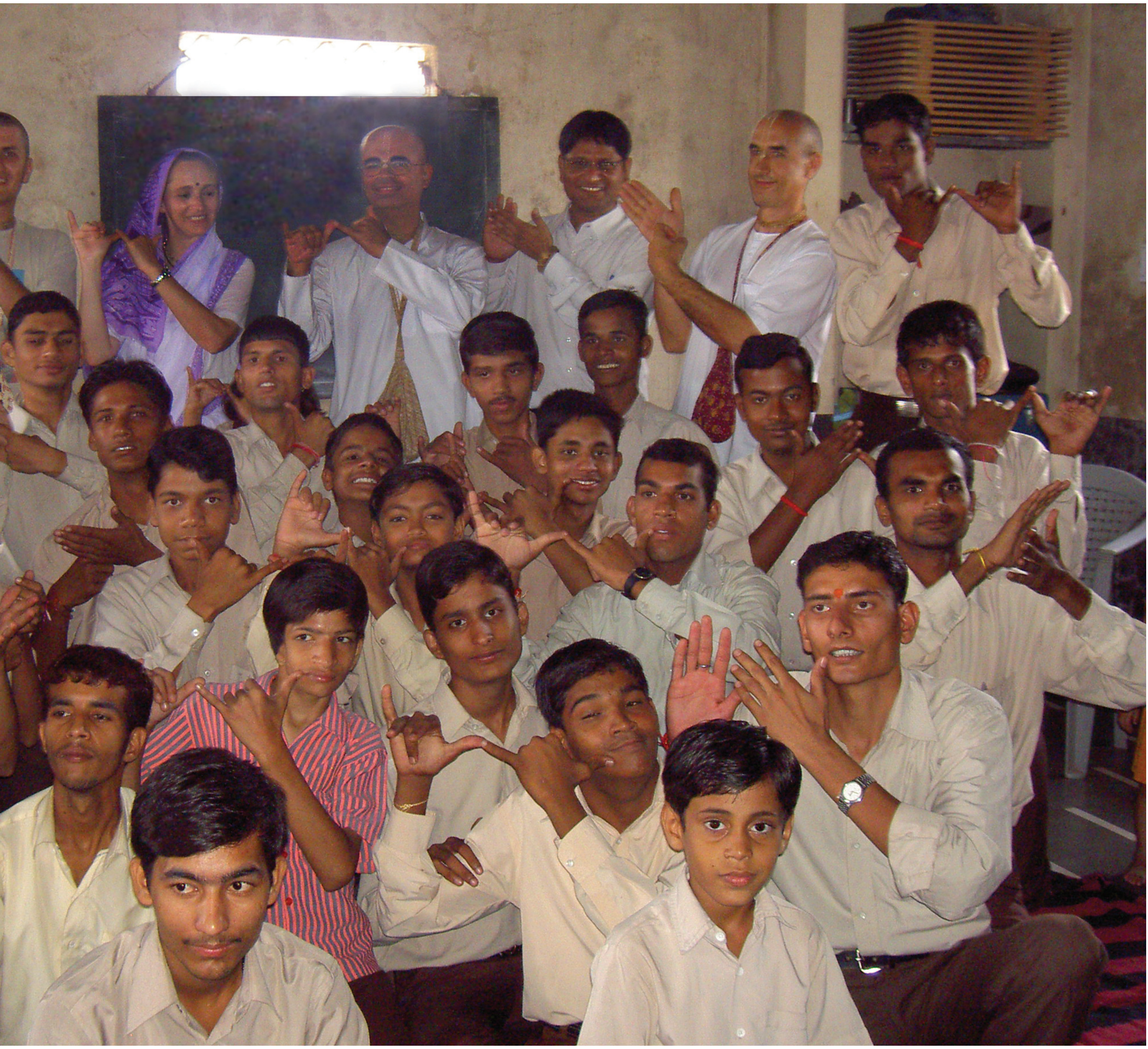
On a visit to schools for the deaf, Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees find more evidence that bhakti-yoga *is for everyone.*

by Ūrmilā Devī Dāsī

Keśava Bhāratī Dāsa

At a school for the deaf, Dayāl Gaurāṅga Dāsa (above) teaches students how to sign the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra. *At right, students and visiting devotees demonstrate the hand positions that represent the word Kṛṣṇa.*

IT'S EASY TO imagine being blind. A simple close of the eyelids in a somewhat dark place or a walk through an unlit room at night, and we can empathize with those who cannot see. Making oneself temporarily deaf, however, is almost impossible. First of all, it's hard to completely seal the entrance to the ears. Putting our hands over our ears or using earplugs blocks only a portion of the



sound. Secondly, much sound is transmitted through the bones of our skull, bypassing the ear. A hearing person's empathy with the deaf is, therefore, limited.

My interest in the deaf world was perhaps different from that of most hearing people. The basis of *bhakti-yoga* as taught in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is to hear and chant the Lord's name and glories. How could the deaf and mute do either? One day I got to discover the answers and to explore that silent world. I visited four schools for the deaf in Indore, India, to teach the children about Lord Kṛṣṇa.

"Is this the right train? Which car?"

The four of us walked through the train and finally reached a non-sleeper car and took out our breakfast. The city of Ujjain, which we were leaving, quickly zoomed past the windows.

The other residents of the car stared at us. We were the only ones wearing dhotis and saris and displaying clay *tilaka* marks on our forehead, indicating that we are devotees of Kṛṣṇa. Three of us also had fair skin, which usually draws some stares in India. But it was not our outward appearance that was most unusual. It was the way we were communicating—in silence.

The gestures that normally complement speech had become the entire medium. One member of our group, Dayāl Gaurāṇga Dāsa, has been profoundly deaf since his birth in an Indian family in the United Kingdom. Prema Pradīpa Dāsa, from Spain, was there as his interpreter. Keśava Bhāratī Dāsa and I were accompanying them. We were traveling to the schools as guest "speakers." What form would our teaching about *bhakti* take with the deaf children we were about to visit?

Dayāl Gaurāṅga and Prema Pradīpa had recently become initiated disciples of Bhakti Cāru Swami. They have been bringing spiritual life to deaf people in England for many years (see *Back to Godhead* 28/2, 1994, Project Profile). I tried, with a little success, to communicate directly with Dayāl Gaurāṅga, and I often had to enlist Prema Pradīpa's help.

Keśava Bhāratī Dāsa

The author speaks to the class while school headmaster Gyanendra Puroit translates her talk into sign language.

The Plight of India's Deaf

After about two hours of travel, Gyanendra Puroit, the head of one school, picked us up at the train station. He explained that India has the second-largest deaf community in the world, but few receive training in sign language or are given a chance to earn a livelihood. In fact, only about ten percent of the Indian deaf receive any specialized education at all. This was one of a few schools that teach children and adolescents the skills they need for the world. Gyanendra Puroit wanted our help in giving them a rich spiritual life as well.

Mostly boys filled the room. Their attractive appearance, bright eyes, and intensely eager expressions caught my attention. Many of these students had to live at the school. I was the first to speak, with the principal translating my words into sign language.

As I often travel in countries where English is not the native language, I am accustomed to giving translated lectures and presentations. Some translations are simultaneous, which requires great skill on the translator's part. Usually translators prefer to work with phrases or very short sentences, where the speaker says a little and then they translate. To teach in such circumstances one has to keep track of one's thoughts while frequently pausing and breaking up ideas into little "bits." When classes have to be translated, I try to arrange the room so that people can see the body language of both the translator and me, since body language makes up about seventy percent of communication. Naturally, these students couldn't hear my tone of voice, which is about twenty-three percent of how we understand each another's meaning. But at least, I thought, let them see my facial expressions and gestures. Thinking in this way, I sat very close to the translator.

Fixed on the Translator

I was in for a surprise. How little I had carefully thought about the world of the deaf! All their attention had to focus on the translator because they had to read his signs, which looked to me like a blur of motion. Not for a moment could they divert even the smallest percentage of their concentration to me.

I spoke about how we are not this body. Each of us is a soul who has our original spiritual body with spiritual senses. Our bodily covering restricts our natural ability to see, hear, and so forth. In the human body, however, the soul has the special facility of awakening the true spiritual nature, just as eagles have special abilities to see, and dogs extraordinary smell. Although the deaf's practice of *bhakti-yoga* would be tailored to their bodily restrictions, I explained, Kṛṣṇa is independent and can fully reveal Himself to anyone who approaches Him with love, regardless of their bodily situation. I kept thinking how exhilarating it must be for these young people even to theoretically understand that their real identity has nothing to do with their temporary body.

Next, I described how wonderful Lord Kṛṣṇa is—His opulences, nature, and activities. And I explained how to link ourselves with Kṛṣṇa through *bhakti,* the yoga of love and devotion. Thinking that chanting the Lord's name would be too difficult for them, I concentrated my presentation on some of the other aspects of *bhakti,*

especially remembering the Lord, worshiping Him, and serving Him.

The students practically jumped up to ask questions, signing so rapidly they seemed to explode with eagerness.

"Please tell us stories about Kṛṣṇa!" they asked again and again.

I told story after story, and their joy brightened the room. Some asked detailed philosophical questions. I was impressed with their broad intelligence and their thirst for spiritual knowledge.

A Comrade "Speaks"

Finally Dayāl Gaurāṅga "spoke." Although vastly different forms of sign language are used in different countries, he has mastered several of them and knows universal forms he can use in many places. Sometimes the principal had to assist him with the particulars of the Indian system, but mostly he could sign to the students directly.

How happy they were! Here was one of their own, someone who understood them and who has seriously and joyfully taken up a spiritual practice normally based mostly on sound. As Dayāl Gaurāṅga signed his presentation, Prema Pradīpa translated the signs into spoken English for Keśava Bhāratī and me. We lived

as much outside their visual exchange as they lived outside our verbal one.

Then another surprise: Dayāl Gaurāṅga had them rise at the end and chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra with him. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. He did this by having a specific sign for each of the three words: Hare, Kṛṣṇa, and Rāma. Over and over again all "chanted" the mantra with their hands and eyes. Usually such group chanting, *kīrtana,* is a loud yet sweet mixing of voices and instruments connecting with the Supreme Lord as He manifests through sound. But in this *kīrtana,* there were no drums, no cymbals, and no melodious harmonium. In fact, there was no sound at all. Yet the Lord, present in His name, was palpably there in that assembly.

We next spent time at three other schools, two of which had children with more severe difficulties than the first. One school catered to the very poor, and another to a mix of deaf and blind children. Our guide told me how much the fourteen million deaf in India value picture books and how his students long to read such books, in English, about how wonderful Lord Kṛṣṇa is.

Keśava Bhāratī Dāsa

The students sign the word Hare while "chanting" the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra.

Deaf Chanting

On the train back to Ujjain, I asked Dayāl Gaurāṅga to explain how he chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra for his vow as a disciple. When ISKCON members become disciples of a guru, they promise to abstain from illicit sex, intoxication, gambling, and meat-eating. They also vow to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra on each of 108 beads, going around the beads at least sixteen times a day.

Dayāl Gaurāṅga has four methods of chanting, and he alternates between them to keep his mind focused. The first is that he visualizes the hand gestures for each word of the mantra. The second is that he visualizes the printed words of the mantra. Third is visualizing the form of the Lord as the worshipable deity. "Hare" is Rādhārāṇī, and "Kṛṣṇa" and "Rāma" are Kṛṣṇa. His fourth method is to form the words with his mouth and focus on the feel of his mouth for each word.

When I tried his methods, I found myself automatically also verbalizing the sounds of the mantra, either out loud or in my mind. It was very difficult to only meditate on the visual or the feeling without the sound. It was also very slow.

"At first," Dayāl Gaurāṅga signed, "it took me at least a half hour to finish one round of 108 beads."

Hearing persons usually take between five and seven minutes to do the same.

"After many years, with increased practice and concentration, I was able to reduce the time to twenty minutes for a round. Several years later, I got it to fifteen minutes, which is how long it takes me now." Because of his uncommon situation, his vow is for a minimum of four rounds a day, though he keeps trying to chant more.

Hearing people might feel that these methods of mantra meditation are, in a technical sense, not really chanting and hearing. But surely Kṛṣṇa, who understands all languages and can hear with any of His senses, accepts service sincerely offered according to one's capacity. One can also observe practically that deaf persons who take up such chanting are becoming purified and spiritually enlivened.

We might often feel that, while we want spiritual life, the practices are too arduous. Yet here was someone who had reason for excuses but made none. His face shone with the happiness of his dedication to his desire to help deaf people find deep spiritual satisfaction. He is fortunate to have the love of his brother, sister-in-law, and nephew, all gentle and dedicated devotees of Kṛṣṇa. He also has support from the Hare Kṛṣṇa temple outside London, Bhaktivedanta Manor.

Caraṇa Kamala

("Lotus Feet")

by Surdas, a sixteenth-century Hindi poet

(Refrain:) I offer prayers unto the lotus feet of the worshipful Lord Hari.

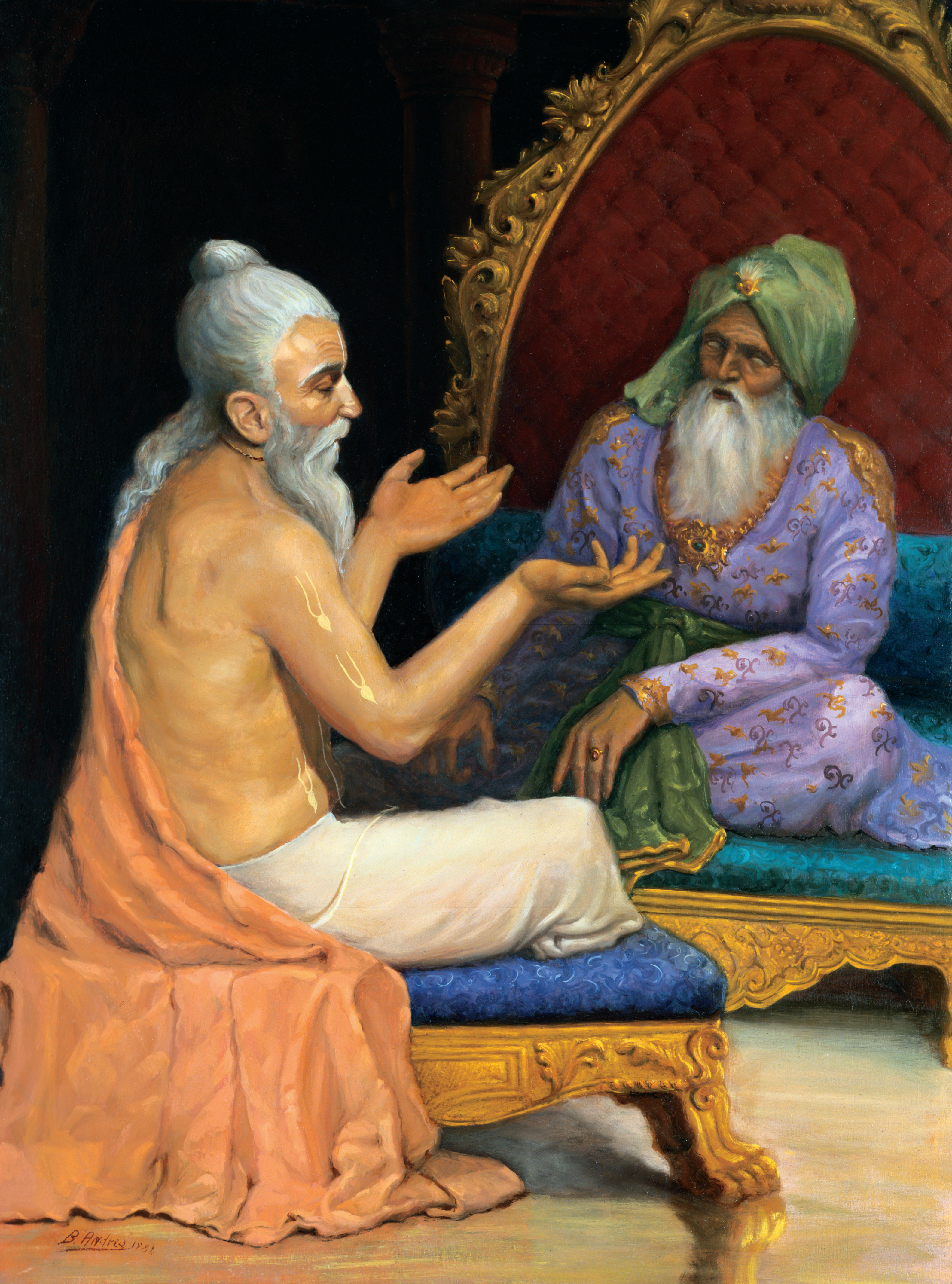
(1) By His mercy a lame person crosses mountains and a blind person sees everything.

(2) A deaf person hears, and a dumb person again speaks. By His mercy, even a poor person walks with a servant holding an umbrella over his head.

(3) The Lord of Surdas is full of compassion. Therefore I offer my obeisances unto His lotus feet again and again.

Generally, though, few hearing people know of the profound desire many of the deaf have for answers to life's problems on the spiritual level. As Kṛṣṇa has shown me countless times in various ways, it is often the people who seem to have less than I who actually possess much more. ❁

Ūrmilā Devī Dāsī, a BTG associate editor, has a Ph.D. in educational leadership from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. She is working on international curriculum projects for primary and secondary education in ISKCON.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HOPE
THE BEDROCK OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

*To ensure the health of our spiritual life,
we must transform material hope into spiritual hope.*

by Viśākhā Devī Dāsī

HOPE—the recognition within the human heart that something better is attainable—can mean the difference between life and death. In *Man's Search for Meaning,* Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl writes that the rate of deaths in the concentration camp increased after Hanukkah, even though there was no change in camp's already horrible conditions. Why did more die? Because each year rumors spread that the prisoners would be freed in time for the holy festival, and when they were not, the prisoners lost hope, their immune system weakened, and they succumbed to a fatal disease. Hope had kept them alive, and when their hope left, they died.

Frankl writes, "Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost . . ."

Similarly, in her seminal study *On Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross writes, "If a patient stops expressing hope, it is usually a sign of imminent death. They may say, 'Doctor, I think I have had it,' or 'I guess this is it,' or they may put it like the patient who always believed in a miracle, who one day greeted us with [the] words, 'I think this is the miracle—I am ready now and not even afraid anymore.' All these patients died within twenty-four hours."

By our nature we are meant to be full of hope (hopeful), but hopeful for what? Hopes are of many types but can be broadly classified into two: spiritual and material.

Spiritual Hope

Rūpa Gosvāmī describes this type of hope as *āśā-bandha* ("bound by hope"): One thinks, "Because I'm trying my best to follow the routine principles of devotional service, some way or other I will be able to approach the Lord and will certainly receive His favor. Surely I will go back to Godhead, back home."

In the mood of *āśā-bandha* a devotee feels, "I wasn't born in a good family, I haven't done good works, I have no knowledge of the Lord

*Wise Vidura redirects his stepbrother Dhṛtarāṣṭra's hope
from bodily comforts to spiritual attainment.*

Painting by Ācārya Dāsa

or love for Him, and no attraction for the processes of hearing about, chanting about, and remembering Him, which will develop that love. Yet still, I want to approach Him. And that very want upsets me because I am completely unfit to do so. In terms of justice, my case is hopeless; all I have are demerits. So, I seek my fortune in the Lord's mercy."

In other words, with spiritual hope the devotee says to the Lord, "I have come to You. If there is any possibility, save me."

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (5.5.15) states: "If one is serious about going back home, back to Godhead, he must consider the mercy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead the *summum bonum* and the chief aim of life."

Material Hope

In the Ninth Chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā* Kṛṣṇa uses the word *moghāśā. Mogha* means "baffled," and *moghāśā* refers to people baffled in their hope. Later on, in Chapter Sixteen, the Lord speaks of *āśā-pāśa,* or those entangled in a network (*pāśa* means "trap") of hundreds of thousands of hopes and absorbed in lust and anger. Hope for any sort of material gain, whether fame, fortune, power, success, or relationships, is like a noose that fetters the soul. We are meant for spiritual hope, but, bewildered by material life, our hopes are now material, and so we are subject to waves of dissatisfaction. One who hopes materially, Kṛṣṇa says, will be anxious, troubled, and miserable —in a word, defeated.

To disentangle ourselves from the baffling snare of material hope requires transforming our hope from matter to spirit.

To Transform Hope: Accept the Lord's Will

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* Mahārāja Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the elderly and infirm grandsire of the Kuru dynasty, exemplified the process of giving up material hope. After all his sons were killed in the Battle of Kurukshetra, Dhṛtarāṣṭra was living at the expense of his five nephews, the Pāṇḍava brothers, whom he had treated dishonorably for many years. It was the wise Vidura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's stepbrother, who redirected Dhṛtarāṣṭra's hope from bodily comforts to spiritual attainment.

Vidura said, "It is the Supreme Personality of Godhead as eternal time [*kāla*] that has approached us all. Whoever is under the influence of supreme *kāla* must surrender his most dear life, and what to speak of other things, such as wealth, honor, children, land, and home." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.13.19–20)

So, the first step in transforming hope is to see that Kṛṣṇa, in His form as time, will take everything material away from us. Within this universe no one and nothing can check the onslaught of time. Materially our situation is hopeless: By the Lord's design, old age and death are coming for each one of us. Through knowledge of our eternal identity—small servants of God—by God's grace we can gradually stop hoping for things destined to perish.

Become Detached

With knowledge of our true identity firmly in place, material desires appeal less and less, and so material hopes, which spring from material desires, lessen. We can feel our intelligence become pacified and our priorities rearranged. Detachment releases us from slavery to trite things and from preoccupation with the past or the future. We accept Kṛṣṇa's mercy in whatever form it takes.

Vidura uses strong words to help Dhṛtarāṣṭra become detached: "You have been blind from your very birth, and recently you have become hard of hearing. Your memory is shortened, and your intelligence is disturbed. Your teeth are loose, your liver is defective, and you are coughing up mucus. Alas, how powerful are the hopes of a living being to continue his life.... Despite your unwillingness to die and your desire to live even at the cost of honor and prestige, your miserly body will certainly dwindle like an old garment." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.13.22–25)

The soul is eternal, and therefore everyone has a natural urge to avoid death. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was no exception. He wanted to continue his life in comfort, but the body, being material, will not continue indefinitely. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's responsibility, like ours, was to use the body, mind, and intelligence to advance spiritually. The human form of life is a chance for self-realization and for going back home, back to Godhead, not for staying interminably in the material world. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments: "Five thousand years ago there was one Dhṛtarāṣṭra, but at the present moment there are Dhṛtarāṣṭras in every home." Most people remain attached to flickering, meaningless

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pursuits and neglect the opportunity a human birth offers. They pass their lives without spiritual hope.

Develop Trust in the Lord

After accepting the Lord's will and becoming detached from our material situation (while continuing to do our duty), the next step in transforming hope is to trust Kṛṣṇa.

If we don't trust Kṛṣṇa but trust something material, turning that thing into a peg on which to hang our hope, sooner or later we will be deeply disappointed. Nothing material is worthy of our hope. Nothing material can carry us beyond the material, to where we long to go. Trusting something material (including our own intelligence and ability) means that the gift Kṛṣṇa has given us to come to Him—spiritual hope—is unused.

If we trust Kṛṣṇa we will gain confidence in His teachings. By His grace we will understand that we are tiny spiritual beings completely dependent on Him, and we will want to serve Him and His servants more than we want anything else.

By his powerful words Vidura evokes such trust in the heart of Dhṛtarāṣṭra: "He is certainly a first-class man who awakens and understands, either by himself or from others, the falsity and misery of this material world and thus leaves home and depends fully on the Personality of Godhead residing within his heart." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.13.27)

Wherever we are, we are not alone. The Supreme Personality of Godhead is with us, and He can protect His sincere devotees regardless of their circumstances. Therefore in any place we can hear and chant the holy names of the Lord, speak about Him, and seek the company of His devotees. In proportion to our sincerity, spiritual hope awakens.

Use Free Will Properly

Next, Vidura appeals to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's free will. Like all of us, Dhṛtarāṣṭra had a choice: to hope in what is not (in *māyā,* the Lord's illusory energy) or to hope in what is, spiritual life. Kṛṣṇa has kindly given all of us free will, and by His grace we can freely do His will. We are free to hope as we choose, yet to hope spiritually is a gift from Kṛṣṇa that allows us to come closer to Him. Vidura told Dhṛtarāṣṭra, "Please, therefore, leave for the North immediately, without letting your relatives know, for soon that time will approach which will diminish the good qualities of men." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.13.28) Dhṛtarāṣṭra could have chosen to stay, but out of his free will he didn't.

With this hope we experience Kṛṣṇa's mercy in our lives. "Thus by his resolute determination, Mahārāja Dhṛtarāṣṭra, firmly convinced by introspective knowledge, immediately left home to set out on the path of liberation, as directed by his younger brother Vidura." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.13.29)

Hope is transformed from material to spiritual by the association of sadhus, pure devotees of the Lord. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments: "We are not ashamed to admit that this fact was experienced in our practical life. Were we not favored by His Divine Grace Śrīmad Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Mahārāja, by our first meeting for a few minutes only, it would have been impossible for us to accept this mighty task of describing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* in English. Without seeing him at that opportune moment, we could have become a very great business magnate, but never would we have been able to walk the path of liberation and be engaged in the factual service of the Lord under instructions of His Divine Grace." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.13.29, Purport)

Hope is transformed from material to spiritual by the association of sadhus, pure devotees of the Lord.

Strengthen Faith in the Lord

Dhṛtarāṣṭra left for the forest accompanied by his wife Gāndhārī and by Vidura, who strengthened Dhṛtarāṣṭra's faith in the Lord. Faith is, in the words of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, unflinching trust in something sublime.

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (6.23) states: "Only unto those great souls who have implicit faith in both the Lord and the spiritual master are all the imports of Vedic knowledge automatically revealed."

One who has faith knows that by serving the Lord everything is fulfilled. Every soul is meant to give some service to Kṛṣṇa, and faith lets us stick to that service in spite of all impediments. Faith inspires spiritual hope in the heart. We live with the anticipation of what can be—that despite our shortcomings we may go back home, back to Godhead. Living with this hope, we accept the things we cannot change, knowing there is a reason for it all and that ultimately the person who controls it, Kṛṣṇa, is our well-wisher and most dear friend.

In the song *Śrī Guru-vandanā* ("The Worship of Śrī Guru"), Śrīla Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura uses the word *āśā* twice.

guru-mukha-padma-vākya,
cittete koriyā aikya,
ār nā koriho mane āśā
śrī-guru-caraṇe rati,
ei se uttama-gati,
je prasāde pūre sarva āśā

"My only hope is to have my consciousness purified by the words emanating from his lotus mouth. Attachment to his lotus feet is the perfection that fulfills all my hopes for spiritual progress.” Commenting on this verse on various occasions, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “If you want to make real progress, then you must be firmly faithful at the lotus feet of guru.… This is the instruction in the whole Vaiṣṇava philosophy. So unless we do that, we remain *mūḍha* [rascals].” (Philadelphia, 1975) “We have to simply take instruction from guru, and if we execute that to our heart and soul, that is success. That is practical.” (Los Angeles, 1975) “If one gets [a] just guide, then that is happiness. Otherwise there is no happiness.” (Vrindavan, 1977)

Spiritual hope lets us use things for their true purpose, namely as means to bring us to Kṛṣṇa.

By hearing from the bona fide spiritual master, as Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard from Vidura and as we hear from Śrīla Prabhupāda, we learn of the dignified position of the soul—that is, of ourselves—and worldly charms become like phantoms. Misdirected hope misdirects and reduces us. “Why shall I let material hope cheat me?” we think. “That hope only plunders me and makes me miserable.” Lacking spiritual hope, we lead a sad, deprived, one-dimensional life full of personal problems and disarray. Bound hand and foot to compulsions, illusions, and idiosyncrasies, we never do what we really want to do but only what fear, envy, and anger dictate.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra, caught in a snare of politics, luxury, and family attachment, tried to be materially successful but was thoroughly frustrated. But by the forceful instructions of Vidura, an exalted devotee of Kṛṣṇa who evoked Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s faith, Dhṛtarāṣṭra achieved success in self-realization. Devotees like Vidura not only cut the shackles of mundane affection but also nurture the spiritual bonds that pull us to the Lord. Similarly, by our faith in Śrīla Prabhupāda and his representatives and by their mercy, we become renegades from the hopes of a materialistic culture.

The Result

By accepting the Lord’s will, becoming materially detached, trusting what He does, using our free will to engage in His service, and increasing our faith in Him, we are cherishing and harvesting the experiences that nourish hope. Gradually we simply desire to improve our service to the Lord. And although we may be unqualified in so many ways, we are confident that somehow or other we will be spiritually successful. Spiritual hope lets us use things for their true purpose, namely as means to bring us to Kṛṣṇa. To live with spiritual hope is to live in the present, ever inspired by the future. It is to live feeling that by surrendering to Kṛṣṇa we will have everything we could ever want. When we hope in Kṛṣṇa, we are freed from the confusion of hopes that spring from lust and greed and we are bound to that Supreme Person who can bring us to a realm beyond our imagination.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra engaged in yoga, controlled his mind and senses, and freed himself from thoughts of familial affection. He “turned his senses toward the Absolute Personality of Godhead and thus became immune to the contaminations of the modes of material nature, namely mundane goodness, passion, and ignorance.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.13.54)

Although Dhṛtarāṣṭra used *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* to become free of illusory hope, in this age the recommended process is *bhakti-yoga.* By following the rules and regulations of *bhakti,* fixing our minds on the Lord and serving Him in whatever way we can, our inane material hopes quiet down. As the spiritual master’s words personally and intimately touch and convince us, the distance between Kṛṣṇa and us gradually closes. Spiritual hope prepares us to experience divine things. By its mystery we possess the promise of love of Kṛṣṇa no matter what happens. This hope is the difference between spiritual life and spiritual death. Hope saves or enslaves us.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “A pure devotee of the Lord does not live on any planet of the material sky, nor does he feel any contact with material elements. His so-called material body does not exist, being surcharged with the spiritual current of the Lord’s identical interest, and thus he is permanently freed from all contaminations. He is always in the spiritual sky by the effect of his devotional service. The conditioned souls are within the coverings, whereas the liberated soul is far beyond the cover.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.13.55, Purport)

Spiritual hope gives us focus and purpose; it gives everything we do a powerful and expressive resonance. Our spirits lift, we walk on this planet with confidence, daily experiences become meaningful, and getting up in the morning becomes a joy. Spiritual hope gives life lightness and fullness. It fosters spiritual growth, makes us bold, lively, compassionate, and indifferent to mundane fighting and the accumulation of objects and money. It allows our life to grow in love, grace, and endless satisfaction, for it brings us to the truth and beauty of the Lord. And what is the purpose of existence but to discover His truth and beauty and to share it with others.

Viśākhā Devī Dāsī has been contributing articles and photographs to BTG for more than thirty years. She and her husband have lived at Saranagati Village, a Hare Kṛṣṇa community in British Columbia, since 1999.

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Nature in Control

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY have made amazing progress over the last hundred years. We seem to know a lot more now about how things work than at any other time in history. And even though science still searches for a theory that explains everything, it has learned enough to produce things that in former times would have been considered miracles.

With so much success, many people believe that someday science will solve every problem. But that belief ignores the fact that along with the benefits of technology have come new problems, especially social and environmental ones. The rewards of science have been a mixed blessing.

"Science reduces the death rate in retail," wrote the philosopher Will Durant, "and then kills us wholesale in war."

Many commentators bemoan the loss of quality of life amid the quantity of gadgets. Why, despite gigantic leaps in knowledge and computing power, does life on earth often seem to be getting worse instead of better?

The *Bhagavad-gītā* tells us that the quest for perfection through material means, including science and technology, is a utopian dream, never to be realized. Lord Kṛṣṇa certifies the material world as temporary and miserable. Would science agree? While scientific theories may support the idea that the universe is temporary, the ultimate goal of science—full control of the universe—implies the possibility of getting rid of all sources of misery. Kṛṣṇa says that will never happen.

Does all this mean that Kṛṣṇa's devotees should shun technology? Not necessarily. No doubt Prabhupāda promoted the simple, agrarian life, but that may also include much hardship. Living off the land has many benefits, but we can't expect it to end all our suffering.

Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us not to reject technology but to use it in Kṛṣṇa's service and reject its exaggerated promises. We accept Kṛṣṇa's opinion that misery is part of life in the material world. Whether we drive a tractor-trailer or a team of oxen, we're still going to get sick, grow old, and die. Try as we might to create heaven on earth, we'll never succeed.

Still, people have a hard time believing that God would create a miserable world. Why would He?

Because He loves us. We've turned away from Him, and the hardships we face in this world are meant to inspire us to wake up, toss aside our rebellion, and seek His shelter. The reliable miseries of the material world should humble us.

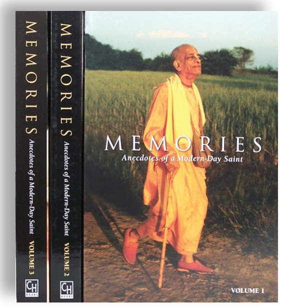
Submission before God's authority is a prerequisite for spiritual life. When one young man heard Prabhupāda make this point, he said that he didn't feel the need to submit himself to anyone. Prabhupāda replied that it was illusion to think he wasn't already "bowing down."

"You are bowing down to so many things," Prabhupāda said. "You are forced. . . . Now we have to find out 'Where will I be happy even by bowing down?' That is Kṛṣṇa."

Battling nature is ultimately futile; victory comes by submitting to the will of the person behind nature. That brings self-realization—the self, or soul, being naturally subordinate to God. And Kṛṣṇa's incarnation Kapila says that the self-realized person "becomes indifferent to material existence, and the material influence acts less powerfully on him."

Like the small fish that thrives in the same raging stream that carries away the mighty elephant, the devotee thrives in Kṛṣṇa's energy, having surrendered to Him. The materialist, on the other hand, will always fight a losing battle. —*Nāgarāja Dāsa*

Being with Śrīla Prabhupāda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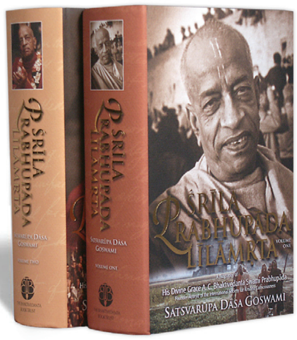
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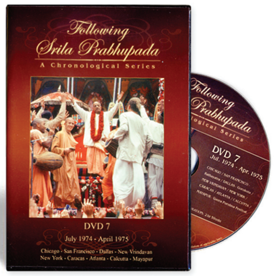
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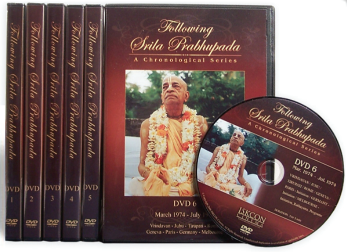
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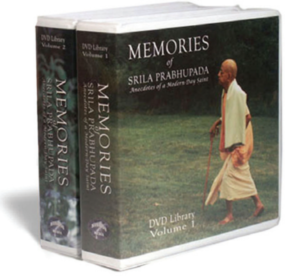
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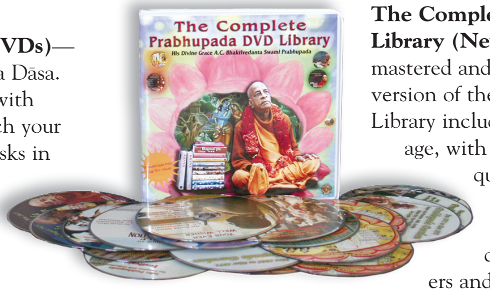
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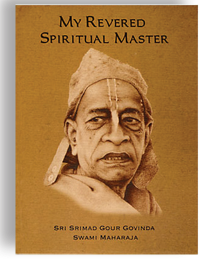
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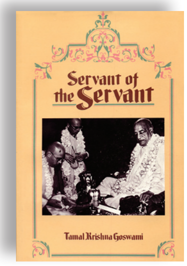
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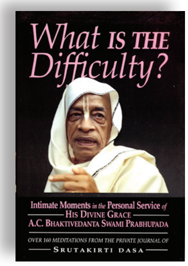
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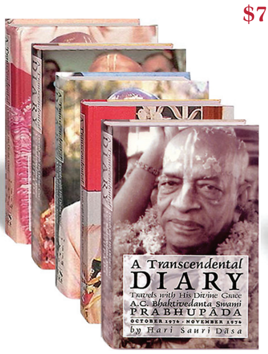
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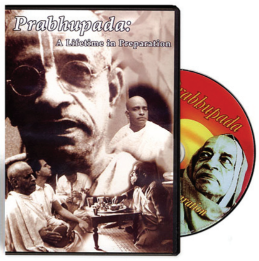
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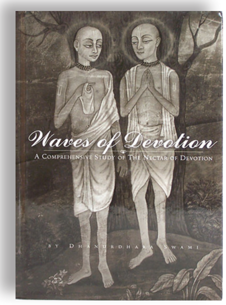
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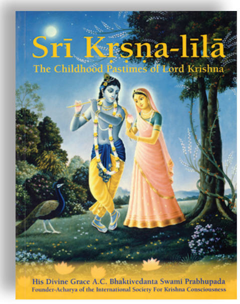
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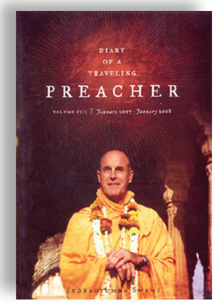
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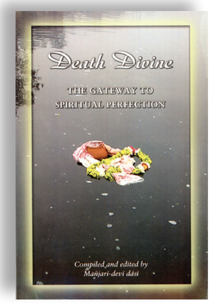
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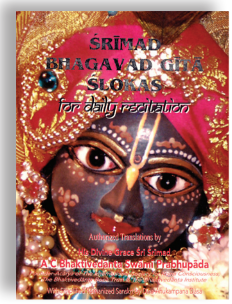
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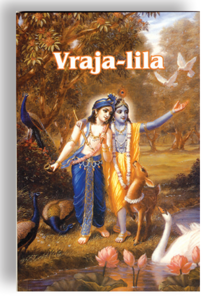

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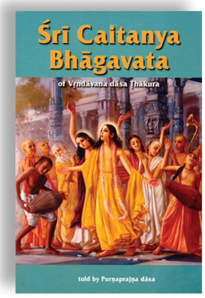
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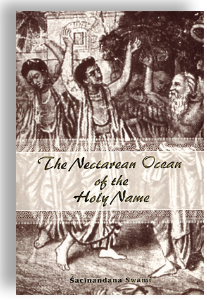
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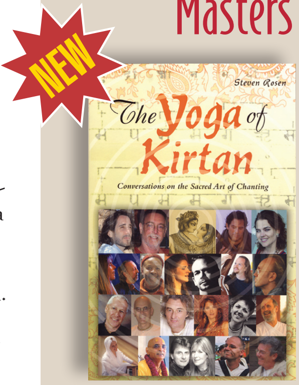
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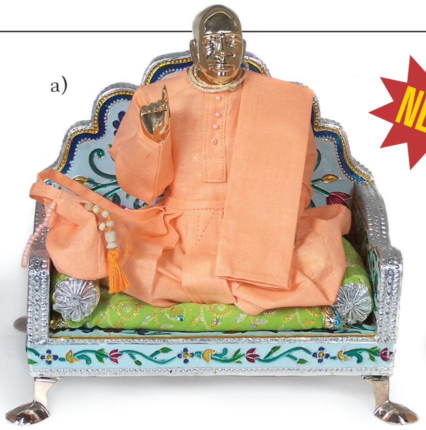

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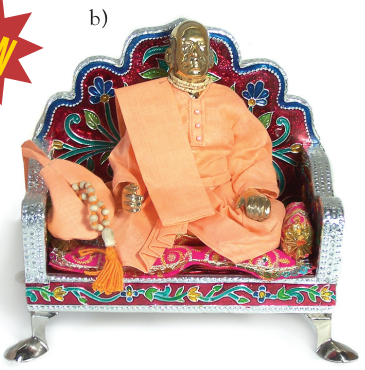

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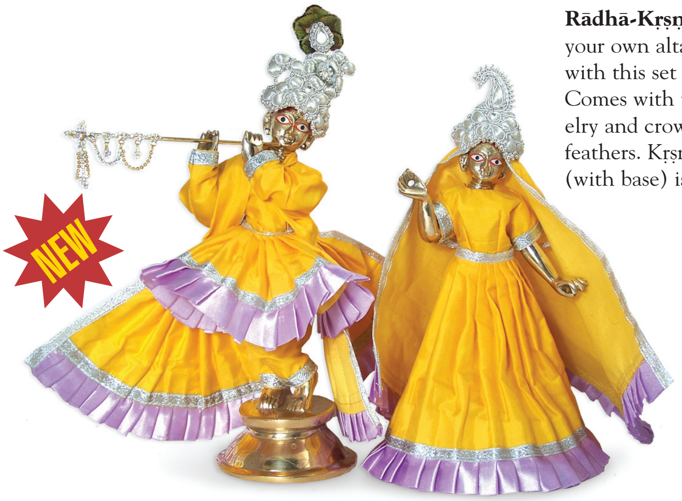

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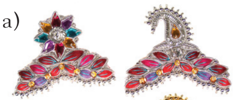

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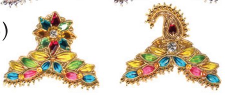

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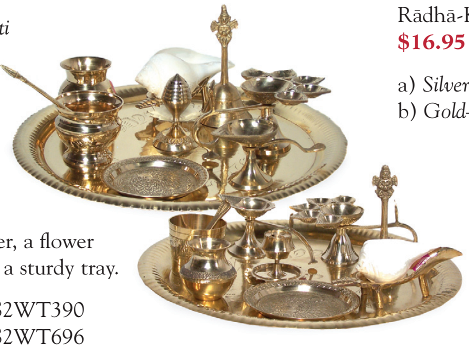

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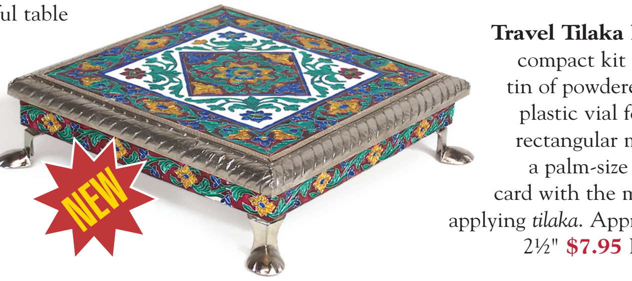
Stainless Steel Offering Set—Simple stainless steel dishes for offering food to the Lord. Includes a 7¼" round tray, three 2" wide bowls, one 2" cup, and a spoon. **$8.95** S2WT391

Spiritual First-Aid Kit—Small stainless steel containers hold Vṛndāvana dust, flowers, and Tulasī leaves, and an aluminum vial contains sacred water from the Yamuna River. Also included are a small *harināma chādar* (13½" x 13½"), Tulasi beads, laminated cards of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, an image of Prabhupāda's feet, a CD of Prabhupāda chanting, and instructions on how to use the kit. Keep the small maroon velveteen box in a car or by a bedside, or take it on the go. Approx. 5¾" x 5¾" x 1½". **$14.95** KXGS634

Hare Kṛṣṇa
Hare Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa
Hare Hare
Hare Rāma
Hare Rāma
Rāma Rāma
Hare Hare

Ārati Table—Use this colorful table to hold your *ārati* items or as an altar for your deities. Carved from lightweight wood, covered with a thick sheet of metal foil, and painted with enamel designs. 8" x 8". **$12.95** GPWT711



Travel Tilaka Kit—This compact kit contains a tin of powdered *tilaka*, a plastic vial for water, a rectangular mirror, and a palm-size laminated card with the mantras for applying *tilaka*. Approx. 3½" x 2½" **$7.95** KXHT735

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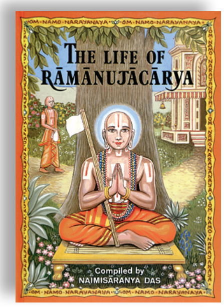
Gifts for Children

Child's Ārati Set—Teach your child deity worship with this miniature *ārati* set. Each item is made from brightly polished brass, exactly like the large sets, making your child feel as if he or she is using a grown-up set. Includes a one-wick ghee lamp, a *loṭa*, an *ācamana* cup with spoon, a hand bell, a water conch and holder, a flower plate, an incense holder, and a 9" tray. **$19.95** S2WT601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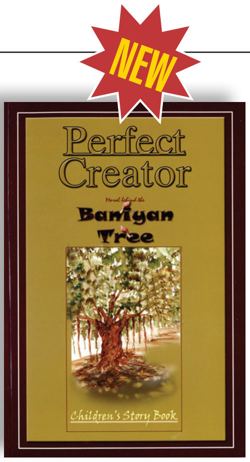
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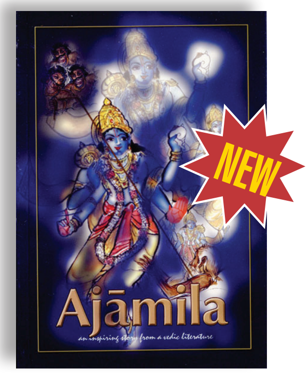
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VEDIC THOUGHTS

Kṛṣṇa is the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and He is situated in His internal potency, which is known as *svarūpa-śakti* or *ātma-śakti,* as described in *Bhagavad-gītā.* He expands Himself in various multiple forms, and some of these are known as His personal forms and some as His separated forms. He thus enjoys Himself in all the spiritual planets, as well as in the material universes.

His Divine Grace
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda
Teachings of Lord Caitanya, Chapter 10

A pure devotee who is fully accomplished in the science of devotional service will never instruct a foolish person to engage in fruitive activities for material enjoyment, not to speak of helping him in such activities. Such a devotee is like an experienced physician, who never encourages a patient to eat food injurious to his health, even if the patient desires it.

Lord Viṣṇu
Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.9.50

To taste the fruit of devotional service at Goloka Vṛndāvana is the highest perfection of life, and in the presence of such perfection, the four material perfections—religion, economic development, sense gratification, and liberation—are very insignificant achievements.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu
Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 19.164

The soul's material life, his experience of sense gratification, is actually false, O descendant of Daśārha, just like trees' appearance of quivering when the trees are reflected in agitated water, or like the earth's appearance of spinning due to one's spinning his eyes around, or like the world of a fantasy or dream.

Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa
Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.22.54–55

Inattention will lead to the destruction of work. Want of wealth will lead to the destruction of discrimination. Begging will lead to the destruction of pride. And sinful activities will lead to the destruction of everything.

Cāṇakya Paṇḍita

The Lord's transcendental form is the Absolute Truth, devoid of duality and of beginning, middle, or end. It is self-effulgent, eternal, and full of knowledge and bliss. Only through devotional service can one understand that form to be infallible.

Vāsudeva Upaniṣad 6.5

A Vaiṣṇava can see Lord Viṣṇu when his constitutional propensity for serving Kṛṣṇa is awakened. A living entity who is devoid of the inclination for eternal service can never give up gross and subtle perception; therefore, due to the spirit of enjoyment, the conditioned soul cannot see his worshipable Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura
Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata,
Ādi-khaṇḍa 5.148, Commentary

Festival Of India 2008

Aug.–Oct. Schedule for North America

August 30–31: Edmonton Rathayātrā
September 6: Calgary Rathayātrā
September 13: Philadelphia Rathayātrā
October 11: Washington, D.C., Rāma Vijayotsava

IMPORTANT NOTE: Some of these dates are not yet confirmed. Before scheduling your travel, be sure to confirm the festival dates with the ISKCON temple in the city where the festival is to be held. Or email Festival of India: madhuhadasa@gmail.com.